

REGIOSTARS 2018

The Awards for innovative projects supported by EU cohesion policy

Guide for applicants

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Please read the Guide for applicants and FAQ carefully before submitting your application.

To help you prepare your application, we provide an application form in Word format. However, as for last year, **applications can no longer be sent in a Word document, but have to be submitted directly via the online form on the RegioStars platform =**
<http://www.regiostarsawards.eu>

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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 an inspiration to other regions and project managers.

All finalists are invited to the Award Ceremony and will receive a certificate and a medal. They will also be included in a brochure, published by the European Commission as well as in the online database of best practices on the InfoRegio website.¹

One main prize is awarded per category. It consists of a RegioStars trophy and a certificate presented by European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Crețu, 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 will be unveiled during the ceremony and published online, followed by a promotional campaign.

2. GENERAL RULES

2.1 Award Categories

There are five RegioStars Award categories for 2018:

1. **Supporting smart industrial transition**
2. **Achieving sustainability through low carbon emissions**
3. **Creating better access to public services**
4. **Tackling migration challenges**
5. **Topic of the year 2018: Investing in cultural heritage**

2.2 Who can apply

Project managers (public or private) from all European regions can apply, if their project has received support from the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund or the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) either under a 2007-2013 or 2014-2020 operational programme.

2.3 How to submit an application form

Applications must be submitted **by the project manager with the endorsement of the relevant managing authority**. The application form contains a template for the managing authority to be filled in.

Each managing authority may give its endorsement to **maximum two applications per operational programme**.

¹ See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects

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To help you prepare your application, we provide the application form in Word format. However, **applications have to be submitted directly via the RegioStars online form:**

<http://www.regiostarsawards.eu>

The application form is available in English, French and German and should preferably be completed in English, but can also be submitted in any other official EU language (in this case the jury will work on the basis of machine translations²)

2.4 Deadline

Applications should be submitted through the online form, no later than **15th of April 2018**.

2.5 Contact information

All enquiries about the application process should be sent by e-mail to: regiostars2018@iservice-europa.eu

2.6 Evaluation of applications

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).

2.7 Obligations of applicants

Please be aware that applying to the RegioStars Awards entails also some obligations, especially for **winners**. They will be contacted during the course of July-August 2018 in order to produce the promotional video for their project. Cooperation with the production company is required, as well as on site presence for 2 days of filming between the period of July and September 2018. Non-responsiveness or unavailability to cooperate can be a reason for the European Commission to retract the awarding decision.

3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- a) The application has been submitted via the RegioStars online form no later than **15th of April 2018 at midnight**.
- b) The project has been **co-financed, after 1 January 2008, by the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund or the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance³ (IPA)**.

Also projects and initiatives that combine ERDF or Cohesion Fund with the other ESI Funds⁴ (ESF or EMFF or EAFRD) with directly managed EU funds⁵ (e.g. Horizon 2020, LIFE, COSME, CEF, EaSI, etc.) or with EFSI⁶ are welcome.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/machine-translation-public-administrations-mtec_en

³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders-0/european-structural-and-investment-funds_en

⁵ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/funding-grants_en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/funding/efsi_en

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- c) Applications must be **endorsed by the relevant EU structural funds managing authority**⁷ for a regional, national or territorial cooperation programme.
- d) Only **two applications may be submitted per operational programme**. Managing authorities are free to use whatever selection process they deem appropriate to choose to support the candidates for their region or country.
- e) Applications must be submitted in one of the 24 official EU languages.
- f) The project description must be clearly related to the selected category.
- g) The project should be either fully implemented or should be in a sufficiently mature state (i.e. to demonstrate progress in the achievement of the original objectives which is unlikely to be the case if the project started less than 1 year ago).
- h) The project has not been proposed for a RegioStars Award before.

4. AWARD CRITERIA

- a) **Innovative character of the project**, i.e. not only "business as usual", but experimenting with new approaches, organisational methods or fostering the development of new or significantly improved goods or services.
- b) **Impact of the project in terms of its initial objectives / expected impacts**. For projects that are funded under the 2014-2020 programmes and which are not yet finalised, the so far achieved results and the measures to ensure that the initial objectives will be attained have to be described.
- c) **Expected financial sustainability of the project**: Evidence could include a business plan presenting steps towards self-financing / revenue generation or demonstration that the project has or will be part of a succession of projects sequentially funded by other EU or national / regional programmes. In particular the use of financial instruments (loans, guarantees, etc.) will be valued as a strong indicator for financial sustainability of a project.
- 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 other projects have used parts of the submitted project or the project has inspired other regions' projects/programmes or that good practices were shared with other regions.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/managing-authorities/

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: Supporting smart industrial transition

Context

Europe experiences a period of momentous change. Globalisation, automation, decarbonisation, emerging and digital technologies all have impacts on jobs, industrial sectors, business models, the economy and the society as a whole. As a result of these changes in the industry and service sectors almost all European regions undergo a substantial regional economic transformation. The European Commission is committed to support regions in developing smart specialisation and economic transformation strategies to generate the innovation, resilience and growth needed to harness globalisation.

The European Commissions Communication on Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth (COM(2017)376) highlights the need to anticipate and manage the modernisation of existing economic and societal structures, bearing in mind that today, more than ever, local issues have gone global and global issues have become local. To this end, Europe needs a long-term strategy, involving actions at all levels, which triggers a fundamental shift in technology, economics and finance.

Regions in industrial transition face specific challenges, notably where this is associated with a lack of an appropriate skills-base, high unit labour costs and deindustrialisation. These regions may be unable to attract sufficient extra-regional investment to encourage innovation through the development of new supply chains, as well as sufficient commercial research structures and firms that could form the basis for broad industrial modernisation. The Commissions goal, among others, is to support regions in designing tailored smart specialisation strategies and supporting their implementation. By way of example strategies can target evidence-based cluster policies, include initiatives to accelerate industrial modernisation, aim to boost entrepreneurship in industries with growth potential, facilitate SME's access to clusters or support internationalisation of activities and strategic inter-regional collaboration.

By the end of 2017 and in close partnership with the relevant Member States, the Commission has put in place a [pilot action](#) involving a limited number of test regions expressing their interest to work on the basis of their respective smart specialisation strategies in order to promote broad-based innovation to address the challenges of industrial transition. The action will seek to facilitate the combined use of existing EU instruments and programmes managed by the Commission together with the resources available from Cohesion Policy, with the aim of accelerating innovation uptake, removing investment barriers and facilitating reskilling and preparing for industrial and societal change.

Objective & areas of interest

The objective of this category is to identify regional responses to these economic and societal challenges by developing smart specialisation strategies targeted to regional labour markets

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and growth potential. Projects and actions should contribute to the regional economic transition. The call aims at recognising innovative efforts of regions that focus on areas where they can be (globally) competitive and where their combination of activities can serve as examples for other European regions.

The call invites projects to apply that cover the following non-cumulative areas:

- *Adaptation to economic challenges:* The project harnesses globalisation by providing appropriate answers to local changes. The region becomes innovative leader by building on the regions' niche areas of competitive strengths.
- *Long-term smart specialisation strategies:* The project supports the region in achieving economic transformation in view of the current and future challenges to embrace innovation, digitalisation, decarbonisation and new skills development.
- *Skills challenge:* The project meets the skills challenge by raising aspirations, strengthening links with careers, employers and the local community and secure additional funding and combine funding. The project supports access to quality education and services to allow everyone to fulfil their potential.
- *Developing a strong regional partnership:* The project tackles the needs of local labour markets and reinforces regional cooperation by providing strong partnerships. The project supports cluster development, community-led solutions and vibrant communities in support of inclusive and positive places to live. The project reinforces inter-regional collaboration and uses the opportunities of exchange of good practices.

Category 2 - Sustainable growth: Achieving sustainability through low carbon emissions

Context

Europe's regions are key in delivering the European Union's goal to shift towards a low-carbon economy. Europe's transition to a low-carbon society is becoming the new reality on the ground.

The Energy Union, one of the ten priorities of this Commission, is creating new jobs, growth and opportunities for investment. The "[Clean Energy for All Europeans](#)" package presented in November 2016 and the proposals on [low-emission mobility](#) presented in 2017 were major milestones in this process. Less than three years since the publication of the [Energy Union Framework Strategy](#), the Commission had presented nearly all the proposals needed to deliver on the energy efficiency first principle, support EU global leadership in climate action and renewable energy and provide a fair deal for energy consumers. Special attention is also paid to smart finance for smart buildings, coal and carbon-intensive regions in transition, and clean energy islands.

By more than doubling the funds available to support the shift to a [low-carbon economy](#) – to EUR 40 billion for the 2014-2020 programming period, complemented by significant public and private co-financing – Cohesion Policy funding represents the largest allocation of the EU budget to be channelled into low-carbon investments. This includes in particular energy efficiency, renewable energy, smart grids, sustainable urban mobility and low-carbon research and innovation.

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The Energy Union is also a major driver of energy innovation in Europe and the rest of the world. European companies and innovators should be at the forefront of this movement and gain an early mover advantage for new technologies and business models. However, innovation in sustainable energy technologies is essential but not sufficient. There is a need for different kinds of structural changes, with many different implications on many different actors (citizens, consumers, businesses, workers, energy providers, public authorities). [Smart specialisation is suited to answer](#) such broad and encompassing changes.

Cohesion policy provides a strategic, integrated and comprehensive framework for these low-carbon investments, and also provides a link to policy makers in regions and cities. This bridges the gap between the ambitious framework set by EU leaders and the changes needed on the ground – in Europe's regions and cities – to effectively make the shift towards a low-carbon economy and the realisation of an Energy Union.

The transition to a low-carbon society affects many people, as consumers, workers, employees or energy market participants. While not everybody may benefit from the energy transition in the short term, it will, if carefully managed, ultimately benefit the entire EU economy, by creating new job opportunities, bringing savings on energy costs or improving air quality. Many of the enabling actions under the "Clean Energy for All Europeans" package are meant to address the difficulties some regions or population groups may have in reaping the benefits of the energy transition. The energy transition should be socially fair, lead to innovation and be based on a future-proof infrastructure, while enhancing security of supply. Cohesion policy has a long experience in supporting industrial transition and restructuring of Europe's regions. Cohesion policy, by its nature, provides a structural and long-term response to the challenges regions face, also in relation to changes brought by transformations such as the energy transition, by increasing economic, social and territorial resilience. Regions and cities play an essential role in all this.

Objective & areas of interest

The objective of this category is to identify regional responses to the shift towards a low-carbon economy and society. The call aims at recognising innovative regional efforts to ensure clear energy development, energy efficiency, develop renewable energy, smart grids, sustainable urban development and building construction as a way to develop resilient regions.

The call invites projects to apply that cover the following non-cumulative areas:

- *Development and Implementation of a low-carbon economy strategy:* The project ensures a regional strategic approach towards the development of a low-carbon economy strategy.
- *Innovation in sustainable energy technologies:* The project leads to the development of innovation and supports the development of emerging technologies in the energy sector. Thereby the project contributes to job creation and growth.
- *Long-term perspective:* The project ensures a long-term perspective of transformation towards a low-carbon energy. The project supports coal and carbon-intensive regions in transition, and clean energy islands.
- *Improving air quality:* The project contributes to the improvement of air quality and the provision of clean air for Europe's citizens.
- *Smart Finances:* The project brings savings on energy costs. Citizens and the businesses profit from smart financing strategies.

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- *Smart city development:* The project supports sustainable urban development through local measures in smart city development. The project supports smart grids, smart buildings, and sustainable urban mobility.

Category 3 - Inclusive growth: Creating better access to public services

Context

Many Member States continue to prioritise the modernisation of products, services and labour markets to target citizens' needs in the provision of public services. Good access to public services is crucial for economic growth and functioning societies, yet the provision of public services faces new challenges through demographic changes, transitions in labour markets and an on-going digitalisation. At the EU level, for example, 'health' expenditure remained the second largest item of general government expenditure after expenditure on 'social protection' in 2015 amounting to 7,2% of the GDP ([Eurostat 2017](#)).

In the context of the European Semester, and in the [2017 Annual Growth Survey](#), it was stipulated that many Member States have yet to complete structural reforms, and “*delivery on the country-specific recommendations is too often patchy*”. This category therefore recognises projects that support better access to public services with a particular focus on education and health.

The [Annual Growth Survey 2017](#) identified key economic and social developments during 2014 and 2016, including:

- *"Ageing puts pressure on the financial sustainability and adequacy of social protection systems.*
- *High levels of inequality reduce the output of the economy and the potential for sustainable growth, and risks of poverty and social exclusion remain very high, although they are decreasing.*
- *Although unemployment diminishes, it remains very high in some Member States”.*

Moreover, it is necessary to further invest in human capital and social infrastructure:

“The development of long-term care services and affordable and flexible childcare facilities is particularly important to decrease care obligations towards the elderly and children, frequently affecting women. Sustained investment efforts are also needed in education and life-long learning in order to support employability and redress the risk of gaps in wages and working conditions between high-skilled and low-skilled workers.”

The consistency between the labour market needs and the education system would be particularly important in order to provide sustainable, long-term solutions. It might be especially important in the case of labour market integration measures addressing the needs of marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, lone parents etc. In this respect the education systems should mitigate the disadvantages linked to family circumstances and thereby provide inclusive and non-segregated education facilities.

Access to public services can be supported by eGovernment. The European Commission is committed to spur innovation and growth throughout the economy by offering a lead market and a platform for private services while reducing red tape and bureaucracy for all residents of Europe. Digital public services in Europe can contribute to more efficiency and transparency, and therefore strengthen trust in governments.

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Objective & areas of interest

The objective of this category is to identify the most appropriate responses to the current demographic and inequality challenges by improving the availability and access to education and health services. In this way, projects should contribute to fostering more cohesive and equal societies. This call aims at recognising projects that support transitional labour markets through measures in the education and health sectors, which can serve as examples for other regions in Europe.

The call welcomes projects that cover the following non-cumulative areas:

- *Adaptation to demographic and societal challenges:* The projects reforms the health and/or education services in order to respond to the demographic and societal challenges, including innovative models for example through new digital solutions.
- *Non-discrimination and inclusiveness:* the project ensures non-discrimination in education and/or health service provision and improves inclusiveness of education and/or health services.
- *Physical accessibility:* the project improves physical accessibility to education and/or health services, in particular by people with disabilities.
- *E-Government and digital solutions:* the project improves the accessibility of health and educational services through the provision of (public) digital solutions.
- *Linking up services:* the project links up education and/or health services to employment and housing.
- *Focussing on children:* the project reinforces the focus on access to early childhood education and care.
- *Coordination and cooperation between key stakeholders:* the project supports coordinates and cooperation between crucial stakeholders in the region and thereby improves the accessibility and availability of services.

Category 4 - Urban development: Tackling migration challenges

Context

Today's migration and integration challenges are an important factor in the development of European cities. Therefore, the Urban Agenda for the EU puts emphasis on measures to include migrants and refugees. On 1 January 2016, 20.8 million people living in the European Union (EU) were third-country nationals (4.1 % of the EU's entire population), while the number of people living in the EU who were born outside was 35.1 million (7 %) ([Eurostat 2017](#)).

As stated in the European Commission Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals (COM(2016) 377),

“Human mobility, in varying degrees and for a variety of different reasons, will be an inherent feature of the 21st century for Europe as well as globally, meaning the EU not only needs to step up gear when it comes to managing migration flows, but also when it comes to its integration policies for third-country nationals”.

Following commitments of the Commission in this Action Plan, the use of EU funds should be reinforced to further support integration-related measures across Member States and thereby improve social and economic cohesion. In order to better facilitate the use of EU funds by national and regional funding authorities, the Commission presented a targeted guidance

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document called “[Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background](#)”. It highlights methods to facilitate the synergies between the EU funds and is accompanied by scenarios in specific areas where the EU funds can contribute, including housing, reception, employment, education and access to basic mainstream services.

Following the Member States proposal, the voice of local authorities was strengthened through a partnership under the Urban Agenda for the EU dedicated to the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees with the Commission as an active member. In this context, the Partnership has underlined that:

“Cities are places where both migrants and non-migrants interact, be it through working, studying, living or raising their families. Cities offer great opportunities for migrants and refugees, but cities are also faced with challenges regarding integration and inclusion. Achieving an inclusive and integrated approach tackling urgent, medium and long-term challenges requires multi-level governance. Cities need to be ensured that regulations will have no negative impact on the integration of migrants and refugees, that opportunities are funded and that knowledge exchange on best practices takes place” ([Urban Agenda](#)).

Objective & areas of interest

The objective of this category is to identify innovative projects and measures that address the most pressing needs in the scope of integration of people with a migrant background supported by EU funding, in particular through cohesion policy. Further, the objective is to recognise projects using an integrated approach, linking integration challenges to economic growth and sustainability.

The call welcomes projects that address the following non-cumulative areas of interest:

- *Integrated approach.* The project connects different aspects of integration policy, such as education, health, employment, reception and housing. It should address at least one of the following areas:
 - Adjusting mainstream services to ensure equal access for both new arrivals and people with a migrant background as a whole
 - Closing or narrowing gaps in education outcomes between children with migrant background and other children in the educational system (e.g. segregation)
 - Facilitating access to primary labour market, with the help of vocational training and/or active labour market measures
 - Providing a long-term perspective for people with a migrant background
 - Creating links to economic growth and sustainability, i.e. through new economic activity.
- *Non-discrimination:* The project ensures non-discrimination of people with a migrant background in areas such as access to services in the field of employment, education, social and healthcare, and housing.
- *Gender equality:* The project focuses on the reinforcement of the gender perspective in the integration of people with a migrant background.
- *Responding to the needs of individuals:* The project focuses on individual needs assessments in order to respond to the complex needs of people with migrant background leading to individualised solutions.

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- *Empowerment.* The project focuses on empowerment and in this way, it is designed, prepared, implemented and monitored with an active participation of people (including children) with a migrant background.

Category 5 - Topic of the year 2018: Investing in cultural heritage

Context

2018 is the [European Year of Cultural Heritage](#). Throughout the year, Europe celebrates the diverse cultural heritage across Europe – at EU, national, regional and local level. Dedicating the year to its cultural heritage allows to show the universal value for individuals, communities and societies. The main aim of the year is to

“encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage, and to reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space.” [European Year of Cultural Heritage](#).

Cultural heritage is not only of value to societies across Europe. Cultural heritage and tourism, cultural and creative industries are an important part of Europe's economy. Cultural and creative industries (CCI) include a diverse collection of business disciplines that have both a cultural, social and economic impact, besides the traditional arts sectors (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage), in particular architecture, web and graphic design, artistic crafts and fashion design, as well as film, DVD and video, TV and radio production, advertising and public relations, video games and multimedia, music, publishing (book and press). CCI are significant sources of growth and innovation, including in other sectors, accounting for 3.3% of EU GDP employing 6,7 million persons (3% of total employment). Investments in cultural heritage can cover and bridge a wide spectrum of actors and activities in the public, non-for-profit sectors and the private sectors (in particular in SMEs) with direct or indirect economic or social benefits (e.g. in the tourism sector).

In the current ERDF programmes around EUR 6 billion are allocated for investments in the development and promotion of culture assets, services, and cultural heritage, creative industries, etc. with a strong focus on strengthening competitiveness and growth and jobs. The European Commission's commitment to support the preservation of cultural heritage, the development of sustainable tourism and cultural infrastructure as well as the support of a creative industry is recognised through various funds such as the [Creative Europe Framework Programme](#), the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprise and SME ([COSME](#)), [Horizon 2020](#), the [European Creative Industries Alliance](#). Macro-regional strategies in cooperation with the Council of Europe explore ways to restore existing [cultural routes](#) and develop new ones. Cultural projects can leverage urban development as demonstrated by the European capital of Culture. Eight regions in Europe identified [smart specialisation strategies](#) related to their culture and creative industry related priorities. These will give boost to sustainable tourism SMEs. Other regions focus on enhancing the 'user experience' through digital technology. There are 32 ERDF-supported Local Action groups targeting cultural heritage in the framework of Community-led local development strategies. All these initiatives acknowledge the direct and indirect economic potential that cultural heritage can imply for regions, through financing the creative sectors, including small and medium enterprises, sustainable and responsible tourism businesses.

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Objective & areas of interest.

The objective of this category is to identify innovative regional approaches that promote, develop and give means to cultural heritage. This call aims at recognising projects that ensure the preservation of cultural heritage, contribute to smart and sustainable development, provide cultural infrastructure and services, foster the cultural and creative industry, make culture attractive and use culture to unite communities.

This year's focus on Europe's cultural heritage is a prime opportunity to give visibility to cohesion policy projects that successfully valued cultural heritage, promoted jobs, growth and competitiveness of cultural and creative industries, used innovative digital solutions like virtual reality to make culture more attractive particularly for young people or more accessible for disabled citizens, projects that developed innovative solutions for preserving heritage, or used culture as a means to unite communities and integrate minorities, or culture projects that succeeded in revitalising urban areas and make them attractive to live, work and invest in.

The call welcomes projects that address the above mentioned, non-cumulative areas of interest.