

REGIOSTARS 2017

The Awards for innovative projects supported by EU cohesion policy

Guide for applicants

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Please read the Guide for applicants 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 2017:

1. **Smart Specialisation for SME innovation**
2. **Energy Union: Climate action**
3. **Women Empowerment and Active Participation**
4. **Education and training**
5. **CityStars: Cities in Digital Transition**

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 **relevant Managing Authority**²,
- or by the project manager **with the endorsement of the relevant Managing Authority**. As proof for the endorsement an e-mail or a scanned document from the Managing Authority endorsing the project, including the name and e-mail address of the responsible head of the managing authority, has to be provided.

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

² To find your structural funds managing authority check on http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/managing-authorities/

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Each managing authority may submit or give its endorsement to **maximum one application per category**.

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 translations³)

2.4 Deadline

Applications should be submitted through the online form, no later than **10th of April 2017**.

2.5 Contact information

All enquiries about the application process should be sent by e-mail to:

regiostars2017@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).

3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- a) The application has been submitted via the RegioStars online form no later than **10th of April 2017 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 Assistance⁴ (IPA)**.
Also projects and initiatives that combine ERDF or Cohesion Fund with the other ESI Funds⁵ (ESF or EMFF or EAFRD) with directly managed EU funds⁶ (e.g. Horizon 2020, LIFE, COSME, CEF, EaSI, etc.) or with EFSI⁷ are welcome.
- c) Applications must be **submitted or endorsed by the relevant EU structural funds managing authority⁸** for a regional, national or territorial cooperation programme.
- d) Only **one application per category may be submitted per managing authority**. Managing authorities are free to use whatever selection process they deem appropriate to choose the candidates for their region or country.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/machine-translation-public-administrations-mtec_en

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/

⁶ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/funding-grants_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/funding/efsi_en

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/managing-authorities/

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- 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 is finalised or is sufficiently advanced (i.e. it can 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.

<h3>4. AWARD CRITERIA</h3>

- 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.

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 Specialisation for SME innovation: from start-up to scale-up

SMEs are the backbone of the EU economy and provide two thirds of private sector employment and young firms generate more than their share of employment. Several Member States have already put in place initiatives to create an environment conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship – often using ESI Fund support⁹. As a result, there is no major difference between the EU and the US as regards the creation of new firms. However, too few European start-ups survive beyond the critical phase of 2-3 years, with even fewer growing into larger firms¹⁰. The fastest growing new firms are those that translate strategy into action in the form of R&D, innovation – including combining in-house innovation activities with joint innovation activities with other companies or public-sector organisations -, and on motivating employees. Innovative SMEs tend to be market-driven rather than research-driven, and quicker in responding to new opportunities than large firms. They play a key role in pioneering and developing new markets.

SMEs are therefore central players in the entrepreneurial discovery processes for the development of smart specialisation strategies¹¹. SMEs need to be closely involved also in the governance, monitoring and implementation of these strategies, together with universities, research and technology providers, civil society and public bodies relevant for the improvement of innovation eco-systems and framework conditions for SME innovation.

Actions nominated under this category could be for instance:

- the set-up a “**one-stop-shop system**”, where all the necessary information which affects SMEs is made available, with co-ordination and complementarity between SME support at European, national, regional and local levels, or the integration of support into fewer schemes but with a wider scope. Synergies of Cohesion and COSME support via the Enterprise Europe Networks could contribute to this.
- **Simplification** measures by Managing Authorities as regards the application procedures via e-government solutions (including "once-only" principle¹²), less reporting and audit obligations, use of simplified cost options (flat rates, unit costs, etc.), use of market practice as regards the requirements to SMEs that use ESI Funds supported financial instruments (e.g. documents needed, periods for retention of the documents and reporting)
- Alignment of ERDF programmes' SME innovation selection criteria and processes to Horizon 2020 "SME Instrument" type of calls for proposals, including the take-up of proposals with a "**Seal of Excellence**" from Horizon2020,
- Use of **financial instruments** that address the SME specific problem of higher interest rates and credit rationing due to shortage of collateral, new forms of SME funding (e.g.

⁹ Thanks to the 2007-2013 ERDF programmes, over 120 000 start-ups were supported:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/key-achievements/

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/new-initiative-startups-start-and-scale-europe>

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research-topic/smart-specialisation>

¹² See eGovernment action plan: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020>

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crowd-funding), cooperatives, sharing economy approaches, innovation accelerators, etc.

- Support for **technology absorption** with "client orientation" towards the SME needs and potentials, enterprise-university and transnational SME cooperation,
- **Growth accelerators** as advisory and matching platforms where tech start-ups and investors meet to allow businesses to access financial resources, new markets, value-chains and specialist expertise (e.g. as part of a thematic smart specialisation platform¹³),
- **Cluster** secretariats and activities to help SMEs which benefit from “information spill-over” and other intangible factors of growth in clusters,
- Fostering **management capabilities** of owner/managers of SMEs, e.g. by training, boot-camps, coaching, providing access to advisory and consultancy services.
- **New forms of support to market access**, e.g. via innovation procurement, value-chain analysis.
- **Digital innovation hubs** help ensure that every SME, high-tech or not, can grasp the digital opportunities and help SMEs to master their digital transformation.¹⁴

CATEGORY 2:

Energy Union: Climate action

Addressing climate change is a strategic priority for the EU and a core issue for the Energy Union. A comprehensive legal framework is in place to underpin the far-reaching EU climate and energy targets for [2020](#) and [2030](#). This paves the way for realizing a shift towards a low-carbon economy and meeting the EU's long-term 2050 greenhouse gas reductions target.

Around 25 % of the overall ESI Fund budget goes into climate-related mitigation and adaptation actions, including more than EUR 55 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund and representing the largest allocation of the EU budget to be channelled into climate-related investments.

This includes measures to mitigate climate change such as energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable mobility in line with Europe's strategic vision for secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy as set out in the Energy Union Strategy¹⁵.

The support also includes measures to adapt to the already irreversible consequences of climate change. The impacts will be asymmetric across European regions: place-based approaches are fundamental. Adapting to climate change is a much broader challenge than only preventing natural disasters: indeed, reducing the vulnerability of our society to the effects of climate change means an overarching adaptation effort of many sub systems like the health sector, electricity generation, transport infrastructure, water management, etc. In addition, natural disasters and impacts of climate change can significantly affect the socio-economic development and competitiveness of a country/region. Investments in prevention and adaptation preserve existing assets and have a high economic return: the costs of action are lower than those of inaction.

¹³ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/home>

¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs>

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/priorities/energy-union-and-climate_en

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Climate, in particular sustainable energy, is a priority in over 100 smart specialisation strategies, as accelerating clean energy innovation is essential to achieve the climate goals at EU and global levels. Therefore a thematic smart specialisation platform on energy has been set up to facilitate cooperation among regions that invest in research and innovation to connect their project pipelines, build critical mass and link into global value chains.¹⁶

This category aims to reward regions that actively contribute to the 2030 climate and energy framework, especially with projects that adopt a holistic approach and that make a clear contribution to the long-term transition towards a low-carbon economy.

Actions nominated under this category could be for instance:

- projects in **renewable energy and energy efficiency**, including investment in the wider use of Energy Performance Contracting in the public buildings and housing sectors, energy efficiency and renewable heating and cooling in public buildings, demonstration of nearly zero-energy and positive-energy buildings, including financial instrument schemes;
- development and prototyping of **innovative renewable energy technologies**, along with second- and third-generation biofuels;
- investments in **cutting greenhouse gas emissions** across all sectors, including energy efficiency measures and renewable energy use in SMEs, integrated low-carbon strategies and sustainable energy action plans for urban areas, public lighting systems and smart grids, integrated, sustainable and accessible urban mobility concepts leading to reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and disincentivise fossil fuels;
- projects that **anticipate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change**, like avoiding damage and increasing resilience of infrastructure; protecting human health; decreasing future pressure on water resources; investing in flood prevention, increase ecosystem resilience and adaptation, preferably by nature-based solutions and green infrastructure (for instance flood plains instead of dikes);
- development of **strategies and action plans for adaptation to climate change**, integrated low-carbon strategies and sustainable energy action plans, at national, regional and local level and for building up a knowledge base and data observation capacities, and mechanisms for the exchange of information;
- development of tools (detection, early warning and alert systems, risk mapping and assessment); and increased investment in **disaster management systems**, to facilitate disaster resilience and risk prevention and management for climate-related risks (such as storms, extreme temperature events, forest fires, droughts, floods).

CATEGORY 3: Women Empowerment and Active Participation

Equality between men and women is at the core of values of the European Union (EU) and enshrined in its legal and political framework. Significant progress has been made towards achieving gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, the level of achievement has been uneven across regions and within countries.

Women typically experience higher levels of poverty than men do; this is also evidenced by Eurostat data¹⁷ available for the EU Member States. In many countries, young women are less

¹⁶ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3p-energy>

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics

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likely than young men to be in paid work, education or training. They are also less likely to complete secondary education and are still underrepresented in science and technology¹⁸. Women still do not earn the same wages¹⁹ as men for the same work and do not have the same access to, or control over, productive resources. Moreover, the gender gap is even larger when gender inequality intersects with other forms of exclusion such as disability, age, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical remoteness or religion.

There is still a long way to go. Not only must progress be accelerated but achievements to date need safeguarding against any deterioration or backlash. Ensuring that girls and women are empowered, that their economic and social rights are fulfilled and that an enabling environment for their fair and active participation in the economy, policy-making and society in general exist, are key priorities for the EU. The EU endeavours to integrate a gender equality perspective into all EU policies, including Cohesion Policy. As a key principle in our society, gender equality is one of the horizontal principles of the ESI Funds. Moreover, these funds offer numerous possibilities for financing measures supporting women's empowerment and active participation in various ways.

Category 3 of the RegioStars 2017 will focus on showcasing examples of how Member States use the ESI Funds for empowering and supporting the active participation of women. Some examples for measures that could be considered in the category are:

- Supporting women in **business and employment** through:
 - Better access to finance and business support measures. Women entrepreneurship, including networking activities.
 - Improvement of the quality and access to childcare/healthcare other social care facilities, and infrastructure development through integrated approaches.
 - Specific trainings for increasing the qualification of women in areas where women are generally not well represented or trainings aiming to increase women's management capacities,
 - Fostering women in science and technology professions and their academic careers, to fully benefit from women's creativity, knowledge and scientific talent and innovation drive.
- Innovative ways for enabling women from marginalised groups to engage in **education**.
- Supporting the **participation of women in local authorities** - training for strategic groups, community-led local development.
- Making **urban environment safer and more accessible** for women – e.g. urban transport, push chair friendly urban transport, safe parking and pedestrian areas.
- **Prevention of violence against women**, including provision of specialised support, social services, social housing and shelter for women experiencing violence and single parents.
- Innovative ways for **gender budgeting**, keeping a gender perspective in policy/programme formulation and implementation for ensuring that benefits of development reach women as much as men.

¹⁸ See: <https://horizon-magazine.eu/key-themes/women-science>

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics

CATEGORY 4: Education and training

Education is of strategic importance for our societies and economic development. The new "Skills Agenda for Europe"²⁰ noted that skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth.

Europe has made good progress in improving education. This is visible in the increasing share of young people graduating from higher education, with the Europe 2020 headline target of 40% being in reach. By the same token, it is a major success that the share of early school-leavers has been brought down over the period 2005-2015 by 30%, now amounting to an EU average of 11%.

In a global competitive environment, quality education is crucial for the EU to ensure continued competitiveness and sustained growth. To be able to deliver on the objectives of jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, it is vital to invest in young people. Providing high-quality education for all is one of the best investments a society can make.

Quality education for all is a foundation for social cohesion and an open society. Quality education is much more than an economic investment. It is essential for personal, social and professional development as well as for employability. And it can be one of the most effective ways to address socio-economic inequalities and promote social fairness and inclusion. To achieve these objectives, education systems need to be accessible and give equal opportunities to all, irrespective of a person's background, and produce high quality outcomes.

Access to education has improved in the past decade for millions of children. But far too many of the world's most disadvantaged children remain excluded from school, and many of the children in school do not learn the basic skills they need to lead productive lives.

Education systems around the globe must do more than increase resources to engage the children excluded because of location, gender, disability, ethnic origin, violence or natural disaster. Addressing these challenges requires more than business as usual.

Investment in young people and in education and training need to start in early childhood education and school education. The Commission believes that inclusive education at all levels should focus on developing a balanced set of knowledge, skills and competences, which can help people to be prepared for both work and society.

Projects and initiatives proposed for this category should show how Member States use the ESI Funds for innovative and integrated investments in education for quality results. Some examples for measures that could be considered in the category are:

- Early Childhood Education and School Readiness,
- Equitable Access to good quality education for all,
- Quality of education and child-friendly schooling,
- Innovations in education, including those facilitated by novel infrastructure and equipment,
- Innovative collaboration projects between education institutions and businesses,

²⁰ COM(2016) 381 final - <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15621&langId=en>

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- Enhance access to lifelong learning, including linked to the "Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition"²¹,
- Strengthen vocational education and training systems,
- Measures that could feed into the 'Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills' to improve skills intelligence and address skills shortages in specific economic sectors (in particular related to smart specialisation priorities)²²,
- Effective ways to address brain drain and strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship skills.

CATEGORY 5: CityStars: Cities in Digital Transition

In the era of digital transformation cities play a key role as frontrunners and catalysts of change. The smart city concept which is gaining momentum globally already highlights the key investments being made for the technological transformation of cities. Digital technologies offer the opportunity for cities to leverage on their strengths and offset structural or geographical weaknesses. These opportunities open up new directions for city-based policy-making. Digitisation is not an end in itself, its objective is to provide better public services to citizens, create business opportunities, and contribute to sustainable urban development.

Cities grasping the opportunities of digitisation create an activating collaborative environment envisaged by a digital strategy as part of an integrated approach to urban development. The city administration advances the transition by expanding digital public services for citizens and enterprises. The Urban Agenda of the EU²³ recognises the importance of enhancing the accessibility, inclusiveness and performance of public services through digitisation: *"The objective is to provide better public services to citizens and create business opportunities. The focus will be on: data collection (including ownership), better use of open data, data management (including the capacity of citizens, Urban Authorities and privacy issues) and digital services (incl. new technologies) and accessibility of digital public services to disabled and elderly citizens (in accordance with international WCAG 2.0 standards²⁴)."*

Cities can be important players in the implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy²⁵ and its eGovernment action plan²⁶. Projects proposed for this category should aim at strategically advancing digital transition in cities and could include activities that involve:

- Enhancing the open access to data and its usability for citizens and businesses,
- Using new technologies to provide digital public services to citizens and businesses,
- Developing a digital/smart city strategy and collaborative governance structures,
- Enhancing local access to digital technologies and infrastructures,
- Advancing the sustainability of urban infrastructure through digitalisation,
- Technologies to increase transparency of decision-making and civil engagement,
- Cybersecurity for cities.

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/skills-jobs>

²² http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8848

²³ <http://urbanagendaforthe.eu/>

²⁴ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag.php>

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market_en

²⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/egovernment-action-plan-digitising-european-industry>