

# HOW CAN THE COHESION POLICY BE USED TO FINANCE PROJECTS IN THE MOUNTAINS?

## INNOVATION

### WHAT IS IT?

The Cohesion Policy is the European Union's largest investment policy. It offers funding to reduce socio-economic and territorial disparities across the European Member States and regions. In article 174 of the European Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, this policy recognises that particular attention has to be paid to mountain areas.

### WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES?

Over the 2021–2027 period, the Cohesion Policy will deliver on five objectives:



#### Smarter Europe

innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation and support to SMEs



#### Greener Europe

carbon-free, green energy, climate change adaptation



#### More connected Europe

strategic transport, digital networks, connectivity



#### More Social Europe

quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare



#### Europe closer to citizens

locally-led strategy, sustainable urban and rural development

### HOW MUCH DOES IT AMOUNT TO?

In total, €392 billion – almost a third of the total EU budget – has been set aside for the Cohesion Policy over the 2021–2027 period. Funds are channelled through four main funds:

- 1 The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- 2 The Cohesion Fund (CF)
- 3 The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
- 4 The Just Transition Fund (JTF)



The European Union has launched Next Generation EU, a programme to support recovery with an additional €776.5 billion through the Cohesion Policy over the 2021–2027 period.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

Every 7 years, the European Union adopts a set of principles and priorities for the Cohesion Policy at European level. National and regional authorities in each Member State are then responsible for defining and implementing their own Operational Programme(s), alongside the European Union. These Programmes describe the specific priorities and actions that can be financed locally through the Cohesion Policy. In addition to these programmes, the Cohesion Policy is implemented through the Interreg programmes, which fund cooperation projects between regions from different countries.



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# HOW WILL THE COHESION POLICY SUPPORT INNOVATION IN MOUNTAINS AREAS?

Geographical constraints and the sometimes low population density make infrastructure investments particularly costly in mountain areas. This can become a barrier to innovation, which is an increasingly important development factor for mountain areas. A modern **digital infrastructure**, for example, opens up prospects for local SMEs, education and teleworking, access to online services and telemedicine. Similarly, **social innovation** can revolutionise services of general interest, mobility and tourism in mountains.

The 2021–2027 Cohesion Policy boosts innovation that can meet the specific needs of rural mountainous areas. It supports investment to reduce the digital gap, improve access to broadband and encourage the development of digital services such as telemedicine.

Embracing **the Smart Villages concept**, the ERDF fund supports social and digital innovation projects aimed at delivering better or new services to businesses and citizens, while also promoting the **rollout of high-speed broadband**, especially in areas where there is not enough commercial potential to attract private investors. Besides the ERDF, the ESF+ fund also includes specific measures to support social innovation projects.

In practice, funds for innovation projects are mainly channelled through Objective 1 “Smarter Europe” and Objective 3 “More Connected Europe” of the Cohesion Policy. However, funds can also be channelled through Objective 5 “A Europe Closer to Citizens”, which supports local and **bottom-up initiatives** and the sustainable development of rural areas.

**What is this factsheet for?** This factsheet aims to give you some **practical examples** of how the Cohesion Policy will be used to finance the fight against climate change across Europe’s mountain regions between 2021 and 2027.

## GET INSPIRED!

### **OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME - NORTH AEGEAN REGION**

**Relevant objective:** To broaden the use of ICT at local and regional levels for e-health, tourism, culture and administrative services.

**How are mountain areas taken into consideration?** This programme aims to reduce the isolation of mountainous remote areas on larger islands.

**What type of projects can be financed?**

- Provision of administrative services for citizens in the fields of culture and tourism
- Provision of digital services & health applications at local level without the need for interoperability with central systems



More information: <https://www.e-pepba.gr/>  
Contact: Managing Authority of the North Aegean Region  
[info@e-pepba.gr](mailto:info@e-pepba.gr)



North Aegean Region  
(Greece)

## INTERREG SPAIN-PORTUGAL

**Relevant objective:** To promote digitalisation in rural areas.

**How are mountain areas taken into consideration?** This programme acknowledges that the broadband coverage gap between rural areas and non-rural areas is even more acute in mountain areas.

**What type of projects can be financed?**

- Digitalisation of SMEs and micro-enterprises
- Digital solutions for the online delivery of public services, such as health or administration-related services
- Schemes to improve digital skills for businesses and citizens



**Examples of beneficiaries:** Private companies, public authorities, schools, development agencies, NGOs.

More information: <https://www.poctep.eu/>  
Contact: Joint Secretariat POCTEP  
programa@poctep.eu



Check out the list of eligible areas  
in Spain and Portugal



## INTERREG ALPINE SPACE PROGRAMME



**Relevant objective:** To reap the benefits of digitalisation for citizens, businesses, research organisations and public authorities; to enhance research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.

**How are mountain areas taken into consideration?** The entire programme focuses on the Alpine area and funds projects in the mountains.

**What type of projects can be financed?**

- Creation of new e-learning and remote working structures in marginal areas
- Elaboration and implementation of Smart Villages and Smart Cities concepts
- Solutions for digitalisation-related risks such as cyber security, privacy, data-protection
- Support for green start-ups, green innovation and greening practices
- Social and process innovation based on the natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine region

**Examples of beneficiaries:** Private organisations, public authorities, schools, development agencies, NGOs, universities.



Check out the list of eligible areas in Austria, France,  
Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland

More information: <https://www.alpine-space.eu/>  
Contact: Alpine Space Joint Secretariat  
js@alpine-space.eu



## INTERREG POCTEFA

**Relevant objective:** To reduce the digital divide and strengthen small infrastructures and digital connectivity services in areas where they are still precarious.

**How are mountain areas taken into consideration?** This programme underlines the need “to meet the needs of the population living in rural and mountainous areas and with a high degree of ageing, or groups with socio-economic difficulties, improving access to public services”.

**What type of actions can be financed?**

- Development of common applications to facilitate online access to services of general interest, such as administration, culture, health, mobility, and employment
- Activities related to distance learning or training
- Schemes to provide citizens with basic digital skills



**Examples of beneficiaries:** Private actors, public actors, NGOs, universities.

More information: <https://www.poctefa.eu>  
Contact: Working Community of the Pyrenees  
[info@poctefa.eu](mailto:info@poctefa.eu)



Check out the list of eligible areas in France, Andorra and Spain



### WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THESE FUNDS?

Public and private organisations can receive funding under the Cohesion Policy, as long as they bring added value to the implementation of projects. These organisations may participate as project partners but may also contribute as observers or external experts. Private individuals are not generally accepted as project partners in territorial programmes but can benefit from funds under the FSE+. The Operational Programmes above provide a non-extensive list of potential beneficiaries.

This document was prepared in early 2022 and it is based on the draft version of the Operational Programmes. Therefore, part of its content might be subject to change. The final text of the Operational Programmes financed through the 2021–2027 Cohesion Policy will be available at the following QR code:



## WHAT IS MONTANA174?

Montana174 is a communication campaign to inform you – mountain citizen - on the many opportunities offered by the Cohesion Policy in mountain areas. In mountains, the Cohesion Policy gives funds to reinforce digital and social innovation, accelerate climate mitigation and adaptation, support tourism, foster youth employment and enhance mobility.

[www.montana174.org](http://www.montana174.org)



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