Citizen's summary

About the programme

The INTERREG North West Europe (NWE) programme is a transnational European Territorial Cooperation Programme involving Ireland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland as well as parts of France, Germany and the Netherlands. The programme area has a population of about 180 million people living in the eligible area of 845 000 km². Switzerland plays a role of an observer, which implies that the Swiss partners are not eligible for the programme's ERDF funding, but can apply for national funds enabling them to participate in the NWE projects.

Innovation is at the heart of the programme's strategy. NWE aims to promote innovation in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the area, optimise the use of resources, limit the volume of GHG emissions generated by human activity and avoid negative impact from climate change natural events. Three types of innovation are relevant for the NWE Programme:

- ✓ **Technology innovation** is the process through which new (or improved) technologies are developed and brought into widespread use. Innovation is composed of a mix of applied research, development, demonstration, and deployment. Innovation requires the involvement of a range of organizations and personnel (research institutions, laboratories, enterprises, financing organizations, etc.), with different institutional arrangements underpinning the development and deployment of different kinds of technologies.

- ✓ **Social innovation**, defined in the European Commission's "Guide to Social Innovation" as "[...] the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, which affect the process of social interactions and is aimed at improving human well-being. They rely on the inventiveness of citizens, civil society organisations, local communities, businesses and public servants and services. They are an opportunity both for the public sector and for the markets, so that the products and services better satisfy individual but also collective aspirations."

- ✓ **Eco-innovation** is defined by the Eco-innovation Observatory as any innovation that reduces the use of natural resources and decreases the release of harmful substances across the entire product lifecycle. It contributes to the environmental "clean-up" as well as the dematerialisation of society. It is not just about clean technologies, but encompasses all changes that reduce resource use across the

life-cycle, regardless of whether these changes were intended to be 'environmental' or not.

Priority 1 and 3 covering Specific Objectives 1 and 5 of the programme refer to innovation and aim:

- To enhance innovation performance of enterprises throughout NWE regions
- To optimise (re)use of material and natural resources in NWE

Apart from innovation, **low carbon economy** lies at the heart of the NWE programme. NWE is a successful area in economic terms, yet it has an Achilles' heel – NWE countries are among the EU's highest emitters of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs). The Programme therefore addresses the challenge of finding ways to reduce GHGs to meet climate change goals. This is not an easy challenge, the NWE area is highly urbanised, and urban areas are major sources of GHG emissions. The region is also home to a number of energy-intensive and/or high energy consuming sectors (e.g. building sector, transport), but which have a high potential for increasing energy efficiency. In particular, transport is a high-energy consuming sector, as NWE remains heavily reliant on road transport for the movement of goods and people. The motorisation rate is above the EU27 average, the existing road infrastructure in NWE heavily congested, especially in the core area. Last but not least, the share of renewable energy in NWE in the production and consumption mix is lower than the European average, and there is a high dependence on foreign energy. The renewable energy distribution and generation infrastructure needs improving; e.g. there are still existing technological, regulatory and financial hurdles to delivering alternative energy production to networks and grids. Moreover, persisting problems regarding access to affordable and sustainable energy sources exist (e.g. for low-income social groups).

Low carbon economy is covered by the programme's Priority 2 and includes 3 Specific Objectives:

- To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies to reduce GHG emissions in NWE
- To facilitate the uptake of low carbon technologies, products, processes and services in sectors with high energy saving potential, to reduce GHG emissions in NWE
- To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems to reduce GHG-emissions in NWE.

The financial allocation per Specific Objective of the programme reflects the scope of the transnational development needs and key challenges of the territory. The fundamental aim of the NWE Programme is to stimulate transnational cooperation

between various stakeholders in the area to address these needs, tackle the challanges and hence increase the territorial cohesion of NWE.

Progress in 2014-2015

The first NWE call for proposals 1 was launched on 7th April 2015 and closed on 18th May 2015. The call was relevant to all 3 Programme Priorities, therefore the five Specific Objectives of NWE. The application pack included the Application Form available in the electronic Monitoring System of the Programme (eMS) and the first version of the Programme Manual.

The two-step application process introduced by the Programme for the VB period focuses on a light application submitted at the Step 1, which embraces the project concept, expected results and long-term effects as well as a partnership structure. The Step 1 concept notes are developed by the partnerships together with the Programme Contact Points and are less time consuming for the applicants hence alleviate the administrative burden for them. The bids that are approved in Step 1 get full support from the officers of the Joint Secretariat to develop a full work plan for the final stage of the application.

In line with the Cooperation Programme and the Programme Communication Strategy, the involvement of new stakeholders and the outreach to peripheral areas and weaker performing regions were a priority. Contact Points from the NWE area were particularly mobilized in identifying this target audience depending on the national specificities and gaps identified in their region/countries. Three main different type of gaps were identified as geographical, thematic as well as organisational fields, the latter relating to a lesser involvement of certain types of organisations.

Out of the 82 applications submitted in call 1 step 1, 19 of them were approved at step 1. These projects were most promising in terms of results and change on the Programme territory, had the highest potential in terms of long-term effects and entailed a high-level of transnational co-operation. The programme recommendations for further improvement for step 2 were provided to applicants. Each project also had an action plan developed by the JS and the CP network to ensure that the requirements are met by the beneficiaries. The deadline for step 2 submission was 31st December 2015.15 partnerships submitted their proposals while the remaining 4 decided to wait till the next call (which is in line with the Programme rules) to improve their projects to the required standard and submit in Step 2 of the Call 2 (June 2016).

As far as the thematic scope of the submitted projects is concerned:

- The Priority 1 projects represented a wide range of subjects, from life science and health innovation (e.g. oncology, mental health, medical products), agro-food industry and bio-innovation support, via open social innovation to establishment of various types of innovation networks.

- The Priority 2 projects also covered a variety of themes. Several projects aimed to implement low-carbon/energy-efficient solutions via participatory processes, new financing mechanisms and governance models, energy-efficient water management, and renewable energy applications and technologies (Specific Objective 2). The topics covered by the projects submitted under Specific Objective 3 ranged from testing new ocean/tidal technologies, testing energy storage technologies, energy generation from organic waste, waste and residue valorisation and refurbishment of public buildings. Last but not least, the Specific Objective 4 projects covered mainly cycling infrastructure, last-mile or greener logistics as well as hydrogen vehicles.
- The relevance of the projects submitted under the Specific Objective 5 was weak. Only one of them submitted their proposal in the Step 2 of the application process, with the remaining two deciding to submit their final proposals in Step 2 of the Call 2, to allow enough time for project development.

The second call for proposals of the NWE programme (Step 1) closed on 30 November 2015 at noon. In total, the JS received 86 applications. Similarly, to call 1, as the assessment process of the call 2 step 1 finished in January 2016 only, the results will be reported next year. Priority 1 (Innovation) was most popular, with the highest number of applications received (40), 25 projects applied under the Low carbon economy (Priority 2) and 7 under Resource Efficiency (Priority 3).

To make the information on the programme as available and easily accessible as possible, new communication tools were developed by the programme. Launched in December 2015, the NWE website includes tools to facilitate the understanding of the programme (a video and an infographic simplifying the application process), contacts with the NWE team (possibility to "sign up for alerts") or other potential applicants (project idea database).

As far as the programme promotional activities are concerned, apart from the Project Idea Lab that took place prior to the launch of call 1 (17th March 2015), the Programme organised additional three events in autumn 2015, separate per Priority. The Innovation Lab (6th October 2015, Birmingham, UK), the Low Carbon (15th October 2015, Leuven, Belgium) and Resource Efficiency (30th September, Rennes, France) events focused on the challenges in NWE specific to the three Programme priorities, match-making for partners and the explanation of the application process. The events reached out to a large number of people (306 participants, of which 64% newcomers) and were deliberately organised in regions less represented in the previous IVB NWE programme. This implies that, even though the overall budget allocation requested by beneficiaries in 2015 amounted to 88,627.790 EUR of Total Eligible Cost, no projects were officially approved in 2015 and hence no contribution towards the Programme indicator framework or key implementation steps (number of projects approved) can be declared for the 2014-2015 period.