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The full tendering documentation (ToR and annexes) can be downloaded from the *Portail des marches publics* in the link available under the section for this call.

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In case of interest, you are invited to download the full tendering documentation from the *Portail des marches publics* and submit your tender via the same platform.

Call for tenders**EXTRACT OF Terms of reference****ESPON Horizontal****“Interreg Strengthening Territorial AGility for Emerging challenges [INTER-STAGE]”****Technical and administrative
Terms and conditions****ESPON EGTC**

31 August 2026

Implementation Framework: The Single Operation within the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme implemented by the ESPON EGTC. The ESPON 2030 Monitoring Committee approved the Single Operation on 26 September 2022. The Single Operation is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund via the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme.

This document details both the technical and administrative terms and conditions including its annexes and constitutes the dossier of this call for tenders. Its original is kept in the contracting authority's records and is the only version that is deemed authentic.

Key Information on the Procurement

Title	Interreg Strengthening Territorial AGility for Emerging challenges [INTER-STAGE]
Procedure	EU Open
Contracting authority	ESPON EGTC 11, Avenue John F. Kennedy L-1855 Luxembourg Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
Type of contract	Service contract
Duration	21 months (18 months for contract implementation + 3 months for administrative closure)
Maximum available budget	EUR 350.000,00 (excluding VAT)
Place of delivery	Luxembourg
Lots	This tender is not divided into lots
Variants	Not permitted
Market access	Participation in this tender is open to all economic operators established in the European Union, the European Economic Area and third countries signatories to international agreements in the field of public procurement by which the EU is bound
Tender submission method	Electronic submission via the Luxembourg Public Procurement Portal (www.pmp.lu)
Deadline for sending requests for information And/or reporting errors, omissions, ambiguities, or discrepancies	26 October 2026 at 14h59 CET
Deadline for submission of tenders	02 November 2026 at 15:00:00 CET

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1 What is to be done? (Purpose of the contract)

The ESPON EGTC is launching an open call for tenders to further build up ESPON's stock of research and provide new European territorial evidence as a horizontal activity in the framework of the [ESPON 2030 Programme](#).

1.1 Context

Territorial cooperation has traditionally been assessed through administrative indicators such as financial absorption, numbers of projects, partnership size and thematic concentration. While these indicators remain important for accountability, they provide only limited evidence on the strategic contribution of Interreg to longer-term regional development.

The implementation phase of Interreg programmes offers opportunities for experimentation, learning and early coordination around emerging challenges. Through the design of calls, project selection, mobilisation of new actors and support for innovative themes, Interreg may contribute to preparing regions for future policy priorities that subsequently become reflected in other regional development programmes and broader territorial development contexts.

Despite increasing policy interest in the complementarities between Interreg and other regional development instruments, little systematic evidence exists on whether and under which conditions Interreg functions as an exploratory space for emerging policy priorities. Existing assessments largely rely on administrative performance indicators or anecdotal evidence and provide only limited understanding of how regional participation in Interreg and programme implementation practices interact to shape regional preparedness and, ultimately, longer-term regional development trajectories.

In this context, there is a need for an analytical framework capable of measuring the strategic role of Interreg as a mechanism for the early coordination of emerging policy priorities. Such a framework should assess whether and under which conditions Interreg strengthens regional preparedness by supporting early thematic exploration that is subsequently taken up in other regional development programmes and reflected in regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts.

1.2 Objective

The overall objective of the project is to assess the contribution of Interreg to regional preparedness for emerging policy topics.

Preparedness, in this context, refers to the extent to which emerging thematic trajectories first explored in Interreg are subsequently taken up in other regional development programmes and, where appropriate, reflected in regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts.

More specifically, the project shall:

- identify emerging thematic trajectories using semantic analysis rather than relying exclusively on formal programme priorities or policy objectives;
- develop and operationalise a preparedness index measuring the extent to which thematic trajectories first explored through Interreg are subsequently taken up in projects funded under other regional development programmes and, where appropriate, reflected in regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts;
- analyse how regional Interreg participation characteristics influence regional preparedness;
- explain cross-regional variation in preparedness through quantitative and qualitative analyses;

- identify regional Interreg participation typologies associated with different levels of preparedness, and
- formulate policy recommendations for programme implementation, with particular attention to strengthening regional engagement in Interreg and supporting implementation practices associated with higher levels of preparedness.

The project shall contribute to answering the following policy questions:

- To what extent does Interreg strengthen regional resilience through improved regional preparedness?
- Does Interreg function as an exploratory space for themes that later become more prominent in territorial policy implementation?
- Which characteristics of regional participation in Interreg are associated with higher regional preparedness?
 - How do thematic diversity and topic specialisation relate to regional preparedness?
 - How does the mobilisation of a broader set of actors relate to regional preparedness?
 - Which regional partnership structures and trans-regional territorial cooperation networks are associated with higher preparedness?
 - What implications do these findings have for the design and implementation of Interreg programmes?
- Through which mechanisms does Interreg contribute to wider territorial impacts (including but not limited to improved services, reduced disparities, environmental improvements or benefits to citizens), and what roles do regional preparedness, policy learning, institutional change and other forms of cooperation added value play in these processes? The results should be categorised according to the Policy Objectives 1, 2 and 4 and Interreg Specific Objective 1 of the 2021–2027 programming period, as defined in Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.
- What are the main barriers to Interreg programmes achieving wider territorial impacts?
- What modifications to the design and implementation of Interreg programmes would enable them to achieve wider territorial impacts? How can Interreg be designed as a more systematic experimental space for anticipatory territorial policy learning and regional foresight?

1.3 Description of tasks

In pursuit of the objective and answering the policy questions described above, the tasks outlined below shall be carried out within the framework of this horizontal activity. Tenderers are requested to include within their technical offer how they intend to implement these tasks – via a methodological framework and approach and including:

- (i) a description of their foreseen organisation and planning;
- (ii) proposed deliverables; and
- (iii) how the necessary research resources and effort shall be distributed between the different tasks.

It should be noted that while the tasks are intended to provide an overall framework for achieving the objective and answering the policy questions, they can also be divided into sub-tasks or reorganised as the tenderer deems appropriate, consistent with their preferred methodological approach. Similarly,

tenderers are free to add to, or elaborate upon, the policy questions outlined above. Therefore, while the description of tasks offers a suggested basis for the organisation of this horizontal activity, and should generally be followed, it is not intended to be inflexible. Tenderers are strongly encouraged to include innovative or exploratory proposals which could help distinguish their technical offer and how it provides a unique contribution to knowledge.

For successfully achieving the objectives of this study, the tasks below will be carried out in close collaboration with the ESPON EGTC and the steering committee.

1.3.1 Task 1: Semantic analysis framework, preparedness index and database

The prospective contractor shall develop the analytical framework underpinning the study and construct a database integrating data from KEEP, Kohesio and other relevant regional development programmes and territorial datasets.

Tenderers shall propose and justify:

- the methodological approach for constructing the preparedness index, including the semantic identification of emerging project topics in Interreg, the tracing of thematic trajectories and their subsequent uptake across other regional development programmes, regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts;
- the temporal framework for assessing thematic exploration and subsequent uptake.

Conceptually, the preparedness index is intended to capture the progression of emerging thematic trajectories explored through Interreg into successive stages of territorial policy development. Illustratively, the index may combine two complementary dimensions: (i) the degree of semantic continuity of emerging thematic trajectories explored through Interreg across subsequent territorial policy documents, project databases and investment records, assessing the extent to which the underlying thematic trajectory remains substantively consistent while evolving across successive stages of territorial development; and (ii) the degree of policy mainstreaming, assessing the extent to which these thematic trajectories progress from experimental cooperation into strategic priorities, programme implementation and, ultimately, larger-scale investment commitments. Together, these dimensions capture the process through which Interreg contributes to the coordination and maturation of emerging territorial priorities, enabling their progression from experimental cooperation into institutional priorities and tangible territorial investments. Tenderers shall assess the feasibility of this conceptual approach and propose the most appropriate operationalisation or an alternative methodology capable of achieving the same analytical objective.

The prospective contractor shall harmonise, clean and regionalise the available datasets. Semantic methods shall be applied across Interreg and the relevant European regional development programmes represented in Kohesio, including, where appropriate, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Just Transition Fund, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe and other relevant regional development instruments. The objective is to develop a common taxonomy of project topics, identify thematic trajectories across programming periods and funding instruments, assess thematic similarity across projects funded under different instruments and disambiguate participating organisations in order to ensure their consistent identification.

Furthermore, tenderers are encouraged to propose approaches extending the semantic analysis to regional development strategies, Smart Specialisation Strategies, territorial development strategies and other strategic planning documents in order to assess whether thematic trajectories identified through Interreg are reflected in regional policy agendas before or alongside their uptake in regional development programmes. Tenderers may also propose extending the semantic space to European

Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation where this provides additional evidence on learning trajectories, regional mobilisation and the scaling of emerging policy priorities.

While the preparedness index shall be derived from the comparison of thematic trajectories across Interreg and other relevant regional development programmes and, where feasible, regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts, the explanatory indicators shall be derived exclusively from regional participation in Interreg. The latter are intended to characterise how regions engage in territorial cooperation and to explain cross-regional variation in preparedness.

Interreg project participations shall be assigned to regions, preferably at NUTS-3 level, in order to construct a longitudinal regional database from which regional participation characteristics describing engagement in territorial cooperation over successive programming periods shall be derived. Tenderers shall propose and justify the most appropriate operationalisation of these characteristics. They may include:

- thematic characteristics, such as thematic diversity, thematic renewal and diversity across policy objectives;
- organisational characteristics, such as the mobilisation of new actors and the renewal of participating organisations;
- spatial characteristics, such as the spatial diffusion of participation within the region, including the concentration or territorial spread of participating organisations;
- programme characteristics, such as participation across the different Interreg strands (cross-border, transnational and interregional) the regions are eligible for;
- transregional cooperation and network characteristics, including the geographical reach and diversity of cooperation partnerships across Europe and the position of regions within territorial cooperation networks, measured through indicators such as centrality, brokerage, connectivity, partnership renewal or other indicators proposed and justified by the tenderers.

Tenderers may propose additional indicators capturing other relevant characteristics of regional participation in Interreg.

The unit of analysis shall remain at the regional level. Higher territorial levels or aggregations across multiple regions would not allow the study objectives concerning cross-regional variation in preparedness to be achieved.

The outcome of this task is:

- a semantic analysis framework for assessing regional preparedness for emerging policy topics;
- a preparedness index measuring the extent to which thematic trajectories first explored through Interreg are subsequently taken up in projects funded under other regional development programmes and, where feasible, reflected in regional development strategies or other territorial policy contexts;
- a coherent set of regional participation indicators describing the thematic, organisational, spatial, programme, transregional cooperation and network characteristics of regional participation in Interreg;
- an integrated regional longitudinal database, organised according to the selected unit of analysis and temporal framework, containing the preparedness index, the regional participation indicators and the contextual variables required for the explanatory analyses.

1.3.2 Task 2: Explaining cross-regional variation in preparedness

The prospective contractor shall analyse how and why preparedness differs across regions by examining the relationship between the preparedness index and the regional participation indicators developed under Task 1.

The explanatory analysis shall assess how the thematic, organisational, spatial, programme, transregional cooperation and network characteristics of regional participation in Interreg are associated with preparedness.

Tenderers shall propose and justify the empirical strategy used to explain cross-regional variation in preparedness, including the econometric specification, the selection and operationalisation of the key explanatory variables describing regional participation in Interreg, including those derived from the transregional network analysis, and the treatment of contextual and structural factors. Relevant contextual variables may include demographic and economic characteristics, sectoral composition, innovation capacity, institutional characteristics, exposure to external shocks and other regional characteristics considered relevant for explaining preparedness. Interaction effects between the regional participation indicators may also be examined where justified.

In addition, the prospective contractor shall identify regional typologies using cluster analysis or other appropriate exploratory techniques. Tenderers shall propose and justify the clustering methodology and the variables used to identify characteristic combinations of preparedness and regional participation in Interreg.

The outcome of this task is:

- an analytical assessment explaining cross-regional variation in preparedness, including the estimation results and their interpretation;
- a typology of regional preparedness and regional participation profiles in Interreg.

1.3.3 Task 3: Case studies

The prospective contractor shall complement the quantitative analyses with a set of qualitative case studies examining different trajectories of regional participation in Interreg and regional preparedness for emerging policy topics.

Tenderers shall propose and justify the case study selection strategy, including the proposed number of case studies. The proposed selection should ensure an appropriate balance between analytical depth and breadth of coverage across geographical areas, Interreg strands, territorial contexts and regional preparedness profiles. Subject to maintaining sufficient analytical depth, broader geographical and programme coverage is encouraged. The selected case studies should capture contrasting combinations of preparedness, regional participation characteristics and territorial contexts, while enabling the investigation of findings that remain insufficiently explained by the quantitative analyses.

The case studies shall examine the mechanisms through which Interreg contributes to wider territorial impacts, including but not limited to improvements in public services, reductions in territorial disparities, environmental improvements and benefits to citizens. Particular attention shall be paid to investigating whether and how regional preparedness contributes to wider territorial impacts by reconstructing the causal pathways linking Interreg project outputs and thematic uptake with policy learning, institutional, legal or standards' changes or even reforms, other forms of cooperation added value and regional preparedness, and examining how these processes subsequently translate into wider territorial impacts. The case studies shall also investigate alternative pathways through which Interreg may contribute to wider territorial impacts beyond regional preparedness, identifying additional mechanisms and context-specific explanations that cannot be captured through the quantitative analyses, while also explaining residual variation in regional preparedness identified by the quantitative analyses. Tenderers are

encouraged to make use of process tracing or other appropriate qualitative methods to reconstruct these longer-term causal pathways and their evolution over successive stages of the Interreg value chain. Where relevant, the role of programme implementation practices and regional engagement with these practices, including thematic steering, call design, project selection and partner mobilisation, may also be examined as one of several factors influencing these mechanisms.

Particular attention shall also be paid to the relevance of the findings for the current programming period and the preparation of the post-2027 programming period, including the identification of emerging thematic trajectories in Interreg with potential strategic relevance for the preparation of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The qualitative enquiry shall be based on an appropriate combination of methods, including document analysis and stakeholder consultation. Tenderers shall propose and justify the qualitative research design, including the interview strategy and the types of stakeholders to be consulted. These should include, where appropriate, representatives of Interreg programme authorities, like Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, Monitoring Committee members, project beneficiaries, regional and local authorities, managing authorities of other regional development programmes, Interact Policy network leaders, organisations responsible for regional development strategies and Smart Specialisation Strategies, and other stakeholders involved in regional policy development and implementation. The qualitative enquiry shall examine not only programme implementation and regional participation in Interreg but also how emerging thematic trajectories are subsequently reflected in regional investment priorities, strategic planning and wider territorial policy processes.

The outcome of this task is:

- a comparative qualitative assessment explaining the mechanisms underpinning regional preparedness for emerging policy topics;
- an interpretation of residual variation not explained by the quantitative analyses, including alternative pathways through which Interreg contributes to regional preparedness for emerging policy topics;
- transferable lessons for Interreg programme implementation and the future strategic development of territorial cooperation.

1.3.4 Task 4: Evidence package for uptake

The prospective contractor shall consolidate the findings from all analytical components into a coherent policy evidence package supporting programme implementation, policy learning and the uptake of the study by Interreg programmes, regional and national authorities and European institutions.

The policy evidence package shall synthesise the preparedness index, regional participation indicators, semantic and network analyses, econometric findings, regional typologies and case studies, and present them through policy-oriented formats, including maps, infographics, factsheets, key findings and other appropriate visualisations.

Particular attention shall be paid to translating the analytical findings into practical implications for programme implementation, including thematic steering, call design, project selection, mobilisation of new actors, partnership development, territorial outreach and synergies between Interreg and other regional development programmes. Where appropriate, recommendations shall also address the preparation of the post-2027 programming period.

The policy evidence package shall also support the work of INTERACT thematic and capitalisation networks, particularly in relation to Policy Objectives 1, 2 and 4 and Interreg Specific Objective 1 by providing evidence on regional thematic portfolios, emerging thematic trajectories and the early coordination of emerging policy priorities. The findings shall facilitate thematic learning across Interreg

programmes and contribute to the identification and exchange of emerging cooperation themes and programme implementation practices that strengthen the strategic contribution of Interreg to achieving the policy objectives of the current and future programming periods, especially those under preparation.

Tenderers may propose additional tools facilitating the practical application of the study findings, such as interactive dashboards, self-assessment tools or other Interreg support instruments.

The outcome of this task is an integrated policy evidence package translating the analytical findings into practical guidance supporting programme implementation, thematic capitalisation, policy learning and the future strategic development of Interreg.

1.4 Expected outputs and deliverables

The outcome of the various analysis resulting from section 1.3 (the various methodologies, analyses, etc.) shall be reported via 1) **static formats** - in a textual way as well as maps, graphs, infographics, figures (e.g. for different reports, briefs, presentations, infographics, articles, leaflets, etc.) and 2) **interactive formats in the ESPON Data and Knowledge Portal**¹ - visualisations like web maps, data stories, dashboards, apps, videos (as agreed with the ESPON EGTC). The tenderer shall provide details on the nature and format of these deliveries already in its technical offer.

The following outputs and deliverables shall be provided covering the tasks of the requested service as specified above in section 1.3.

1.4.1 Expected outputs

The main outputs of the service shall be:

- A semantic taxonomy and analysis of project topics across Interreg, other relevant regional development programmes and, where feasible, regional development strategies and other territorial policy contexts, identifying thematic trajectories first explored through Interreg and their subsequent uptake across regional development programmes and strategic policy documents.
- An operational preparedness index measuring the extent to which thematic trajectories first explored through Interreg are subsequently reflected in projects funded under other regional development programmes and, where appropriate, in regional development strategies and other strategic policy documents.
- A set of regional Interreg participation indicators describing regional participation characteristics, including but not limited to thematic diversity and renewal, diversity across policy objectives, mobilisation of new actors, territorial diffusion of participation, participation across the different Interreg strands, geographical reach of transregional cooperation partnerships and other relevant characteristics proposed and justified by the prospective contractor.
- A territorial cooperation network analysis identifying the structure and evolution of territorial cooperation networks, including the role of regions and, where proposed, participating organisations within these networks, together with the corresponding regional network indicators for integration into the regional database.
- An integrated regional database, using the region as the principal unit of analysis (preferably NUTS-3), combining harmonised project, partner and regional information from KEEP, Kohesio

¹ <https://gis-portal.espon.eu/arcgis/apps/sites/#/espon-hub>

and other relevant sources, including semantic, network and other territorial contextual information required for the analyses.

- An analytical assessment explaining cross-regional variation in preparedness, including hypotheses, econometric evidence on the relationship between regional participation in Interreg and preparedness for emerging policy topics as well as regional typologies.
- A comparative set of case studies, drawn from different Interreg eligible areas and regional contexts, to illustrate the diversity of territorial settings, explaining the mechanisms underpinning regional preparedness, notably residual variation not explained by the quantitative analysis as well as alternative pathways through which Interreg contributes to preparedness.
- A policy evidence package translating the analytical findings into practical guidance for programme implementation and broader Interreg uptake. This shall include policy messages, maps, infographics, factsheets, visualisations, regional typologies, examples of thematic trajectories and other materials supporting INTERACT thematic and capitalisation networks, Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, Monitoring Committees, regional and national authorities and, where appropriate, the preparation of the post-2027 programming period.

Data and interactive maps and graphs resulting from the research and provided in the format compatible with the environment of the ESPON Data and Knowledge Portal.

1.4.2 Deliverables

The technical offer shall include a description of the format and the content of all deliverables according to the methodological concept the tenderer proposes to implement. The technical offer shall also indicate to which task(s) each deliverable is referring to.

1.4.2.1 Predefined deliverables

The selected service provider is requested to submit at least 4 predefined deliverables, linked to foreseen payments in the contract (3 interim and 1 final payment):

- One inception deliverable
- Two progress reports
- One final deliverable

The table presented in section 1.5.3 below indicates the time schedule for the predefined deliverables.

N.B. All reports and related deliverables (e.g. PPT, maps, posters, data delivery etc.) must use ESPON corporate identity and templates provided; specific instructions will be provided to the service provider during the kick-off meeting.

1.4.2.2 An inception deliverable containing at least:

- Report (up to 10.000 words, excluding annexes) including:
 - A detailed methodological framework for semantic analysis, including the proposed taxonomy of project topics, the identification of emerging thematic trajectories, thematic matching across funding instruments and, where proposed, links to regional development strategies, Smart Specialisation Strategies, European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation or other relevant strategic documents.

- A detailed data strategy, including the datasets to be used beyond KEEP and Kohesio, data harmonisation procedures, regionalisation, geocoding, organisation disambiguation and quality assurance.
- A final methodological specification of the preparedness index construction, including temporal framework and semantic matching procedures.
- A final specification of the regional participation indicators, including thematic, organisational, spatial, programme, transregional cooperation and network characteristics.
- A final methodological framework for the territorial cooperation network analysis, including the proposed network structure, levels of analysis and network indicators.
- A final empirical strategy for explaining preparedness, including hypotheses, explanatory variables, contextual controls, estimation methods and clustering techniques.
- A final case study strategy, including selection criteria, a long list of candidate case studies to be discussed and agreed with the ESPON EGTC.
- Work plan presenting the next steps foreseen in the project's implementation, including meetings with selected target groups
- Description of the format and content of the next intermediary deliverables.
- The approach towards evidence visualisations (infographics, maps, etc.).

1.4.2.3 A final deliverable containing at least:

Static formats:

- Final main report (up to 20.000 words, excluding bibliography and scientific annexes) including:
 - Executive summary and key policy messages (2-5 pages including infographics).
 - Regional preparedness index and its interpretation.
 - Main findings from the semantic, network and econometric analyses.
 - Regional typologies for Interreg participation and preparedness for emerging policy topics.
 - A comparative synthesis highlighting the main findings across all case studies, including illustrative narratives and transferable lessons, supporting dissemination, policy learning and uptake.
 - Practical recommendations for programme implementation, policy learning, INTERACT thematic and capitalisation networks and, where appropriate, the preparation of the post-2027 programming period.
- Scientific annexes, detailing the methodology and the research results including:
 - Detailed methodological framework.
 - Semantic analysis methodology, indicator construction and data harmonisation procedures.
 - Construction of regional participation indicators.
 - Network analysis.
 - Database documentation.

- Hypotheses, econometric specifications and robustness checks
- Cluster analysis.
- Detailed case study methodology.
- Methodological limitations and recommendations for future research.
- Presentations (PPT, or similar - editable) of the research results: one technical presentation of the methodology, and one broader/policy-oriented presentation of the results, conclusions and recommendations adapted for the general audience.
- **All figures** (graphs, schematics, illustrations, and images) included in the final deliverables. These shall be submitted together with their source files, particularly when underlying data are involved (e.g. editable spreadsheet files such as XLSX, and editable vector formats such as PDF, EPS or AI). All images must also be delivered separately in high-resolution PNG format. Any externally sourced images must be properly credited and licensed.
- All maps included in the final deliverables. These shall be submitted together with their source files, including the map project files (e.g. from QGIS or ArcGIS). These project files must contain correctly linked spatial and attribute data (e.g. SHP, GPKG, CSV, XLSX, or geodatabases). All map layout exports must be provided both in editable vector formats (such as PDF, EPS, or AI) and in PNG format.

All maps must follow the layout design of the ESPON map templates (MapKits), and all associated data files must be saved within the designated folder structure of the template. Additional editing and finalisation in vector editing software is permitted and encouraged. The service provider must also be able to adapt the templates, when necessary, for example to adjust the spatial extent of the map (e.g. zooming in on case study areas).

- **Structured data and metadata from** all maps and figures. These must be provided using the ESPON data and metadata templates. The service provider shall organise descriptive and statistical data in Excel spreadsheets, structured as one or multiple datasets depending on the project outputs. Relevant spatial data must be delivered as .shp, .gpkg, or geodatabases. The data delivery should constitute a standalone product and include the following:
 - **Well-defined metadata:** All data must be accompanied by metadata explaining and describing the dataset. Metadata should provide context and include details such as title, code, abstract, source, type, years covered, and geographic coverage. Detailed requirements for metadata are provided in the [ESPON Database documentation](https://database.espon.eu/doc/)².
 - **Replicability, modularity and reuse:** Data must be delivered in a way that allows analyses to be reproduced and facilitates reuse beyond the project. This includes providing sufficiently granular temporal data, ensuring a multilevel perspective (local/regional, national, EU27), and delivering background data together with any derived or aggregated datasets.
 - **Good spatio-temporal coverage, high granularity and special attention to data gaps:** Data must cover all countries participating in the ESPON Programme (EU27 + EFTA) for the longest time-series and spatial granularity feasible if not stated or agreed otherwise. Particular attention should be given to identifying and addressing data gaps. Where gaps exist, complementary data sources, interpolation, or other appropriate methods should be used where feasible. In addition to the ESPON Programme area, data

² <https://database.espon.eu/doc/>

for candidate and potential candidate countries, microstates, and the United Kingdom should also be included, whenever feasible.

Interactive formats:

In addition to the static content, service providers must also develop interactive content for the ESPON Data and Knowledge Portal; this a platform that allows to develop and publish interactive webpages, atlases, handbooks interactive reports, web-based maps, data stories, dashboards and various content driven applications. The platform is based on ArcGIS Enterprise technology, and all the proposed/requested interactive visualisations or solutions must be compatible with the system. The platform provides configurable widgets and templates to allow easy development of the abovementioned content even with no or basic programming skills. Access to the platform with a dedicated workspace will be provided to the service provider by the ESPON EGTC. The exact format and structure of the interactive content shall be agreed with the ESPON EGTC.

1.4.2.4 Two progress reports

In addition to the above, the service provider will be requested to submit two progress reports, corresponding to foreseen interim payment in the contract.

Those brief reports (up to 5.000 words) shall provide:

- an overview on the progress of the implementation of the project, highlighting the status of the different tasks and the challenges and risks associated for the good achievement of the research.
- the list the meetings held.
- the list of the intermediary deliverables submitted since the previous pre-defined deliverable.

The service provider will receive written feedback from the ESPON EGTC on each mandatory delivery (inception, final and progress report) including approval or request for revision and/or addressing identified challenges (indicatively within two weeks after receiving them and one month for the final delivery).

1.4.2.5 Intermediary deliverables

In addition to the predefined deliverables, service providers are expected to provide intermediary deliverables. These can take different forms, depending on the profile and content of the requested tasks. Their exact quantity, format and content shall be proposed in the technical offer, then agreed between the ESPON EGTC and the service provider at the kick off meeting. They shall be submitted on a scheduled basis corresponding to the progress of the implementation of the different tasks described above (see sections 1.3).

While leaving freedom to the tenderers to define the intermediary deliverables in their technical offer, the following shall be considered:

- 1) intermediary deliverables shall be planned throughout the project's life cycle and are expected in between each of the pre-defined deliverables.
- 2) compulsory element of the intermediary deliverables are the data resource that shall be steadily acquired processed and submitted to the ESPON EGTC, a detailed overview of the data collection process and data structure, and adjustments related to the data strategy when necessary (see dedicated section about data deliverable process below).

The service provider will receive feedback from the ESPON EGTC on each deliverable. Bearing in mind the timing of the study and the overlap with the programming of the new period, intermediate results

could be shared as such with relevant regional and national stakeholders or Interreg programme authorities.

The technical offer shall indicate the time schedule for all intermediary deliverables proposed by the tenderer.

1.4.3 Common requirements for all deliverables

All deliverables should be delivered in electronic (editable) format and the text – whatever the format of the deliverable, as relevant, should have gone through a thorough language check, preferably by an English native speaker. ESPON EGTC will provide the generic templates for the reports and maps, however, the service provider shall adjust the templates if necessary, depending on the geographic extent or the relevant peculiarities.

1.5 Project management

1.5.1 Mandatory meetings foreseen during the contract implementation

The service provider shall ensure participation (of at least with one team representative) in all mandatory meetings mentioned below. Costs related to these meetings must be included in the Annex B financial offer of this call for tenders. No other expenses will be paid by the contracting authority to the service provider.

Most of these meetings are held online. In case of a physical meeting (up to 4 physical meetings shall be organised during the lifetime of the project), it will normally take place at the ESPON EGTC's premises in Luxembourg. However, physical meetings may also take place at other suitable locations, upon agreement between the service provider, the involved stakeholders if relevant and the ESPON EGTC.

Kick-off meeting

It will consist of a general presentation and dialogue regarding the objectives and tasks of the service contract. The kick off meeting will also address more precisely the organisation of the project and the plans for the intermediary deliverables. The service provider will receive guidelines and all relevant information concerning the proper application of the ESPON Corporate Identity; this includes guidance on the ESPON Data and Knowledge Portal interface for data delivery and digital deliverables, on how to design the maps in line with the main elements of the ESPON layout, as well as on communicating results during the project implementation.

Steering Committee meetings

Partnership and cooperation are central to the implementation of ESPON European research projects and are prerequisites for ensuring useful results and effective policy uptake. The successful accomplishment of the objectives of this project will be achieved by proactive participation between selected stakeholders, the ESPON EGTC and the service provider at every stage of the implementation.

To allow for a framework that facilitates successful cooperation, a Steering Committee shall be established for the lifetime of this European research project. The main purpose of the Steering Committee is to ensure the involvement and active participation of stakeholders in the implementation and steering of the project and to safeguard the policy relevance of project outputs for the stakeholders.

The goals of the Steering Committee meetings are, as follows:

- To closely follow and advise the implementation of the research, making sure that it meets both research objectives and policy demands;
- To discuss and give feedback to deliverables from the service provider and provide guidance for the subsequent steps of the research and service contract implementation;
- To discuss and agree upon how to deliver - at each stage of the implementation – the results of the research to selected target groups.

The composition of the Steering Committee is defined by the ESPON EGTC and communicated to the service provider. It comprises at least stakeholders of the territories for which case studies are expected and the ESPON EGTC. Other external stakeholders (e.g. representatives of the [ESPON Monitoring Committee](#)) and/or relevant organisations may also take part in the Steering Committee.

Indicatively, three steering committee meetings shall be foreseen.

- The first one shall take place ca. 1 month after the kick-off meeting, preferably as a physical meeting.

The timing and location of the other Steering Committee meetings will be discussed and agreed during the kick-off meeting and may be amended during the project implementation.

1.5.2 Ad-hoc coordination meetings

Project coordination meetings are organised to discuss the service contract implementation: these **meetings** may be organised to discuss deliverables submitted and to provide related feedback, or other related issues to the organisation of the work and content, including also:

- **meetings** involving the data specialist of the ESPON EGTC, which may be organised to discuss the data strategy and collection, visualisations and a map-validation workshop.
- **meetings** involving the brand manager of the ESPON EGTC, which may be organised to discuss the communication strategy during implementation: presentation of intermediary results, informing the audience on the progress made during the project lifetime, etc.

Defined case by case, these take place on a regular basis when deemed necessary. The meetings are organised by ESPON EGTC, and the conclusions may be documented.

1.5.3 Indicative time schedule

The table below presents the indicative time schedule for the predefined deliverables and kick-off and steering committee meetings.

The exact deadlines for the predefined deliverables as well as the indicative time schedule for all other intermediary deliverables and for coordination and steering committee meetings will be agreed during the kick-off meeting.

The minutes of the kick-off meeting, containing a record of the agreed dates, will be signed by the representatives of both, the service provider and the ESPON EGTC, and will be subject to article of the service contract - "Performance of the contract and subcontracting".

Meetings	Predefined deliverables	Indicative deadline ³
Kick-off		As soon as possible (and normally within 2 weeks) after the award of the contract
	Inception Deliverable	T +1 months
1st Steering Committee		T + 2 months
	Progress report 1	T + 6 months
2nd Steering Committee		T + 9 months
	Progress report 2	T + 12 months
	Final Deliverable	T + 16 months
Final Steering Committee		T + 18 months

1.6 Technical and professional capacity requirements

The service provider must have proven, European/transnational scale research expertise and multidisciplinary experience relevant to the contract subject matter in order to ensure the successful implementation of the service. The competences and experience of the service provider within the fields outlined below shall be clearly demonstrated and documented, as requested in Sections 4.3 and 5.2, as part of the verification of selection criteria.

- Proven experience in research related to European territorial cooperation programmes (e.g. Interreg) and in network analysis.
- Proven experience in mapping, data collection, data quality check and data visualisation.
- At least one proposed expert shall have at least five years of professional experience and an academic background in economics, public policy or regional studies.
- At least one of the proposed experts shall have at least five years of professional experience and an academic background in statistics and econometrics.
- At least one of the proposed team members of the service provider shall have at least three years of experience in data science, semantic analysis and natural language processing.
- At least one proposed expert shall demonstrate have at least three years of experience in GIS web-based GIS, and data visualisation skills (QGIS, ArcGIS or equivalent).
- At least one member should have communication/journalistic background and experience in visualising and presenting research findings in an easy-to-grasp way.
- Team members shall demonstrate a very good linguistic ability to draft and communicate research findings in high-quality English.

³ The letter "T" in this table stands for the date of the kick-off meeting. Timeframes are indicative.

(...)

End of extract

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