

Next 2 Met | Interreg Europe
Increasing attractiveness of Next2Met regions with soft digitalisation
measures

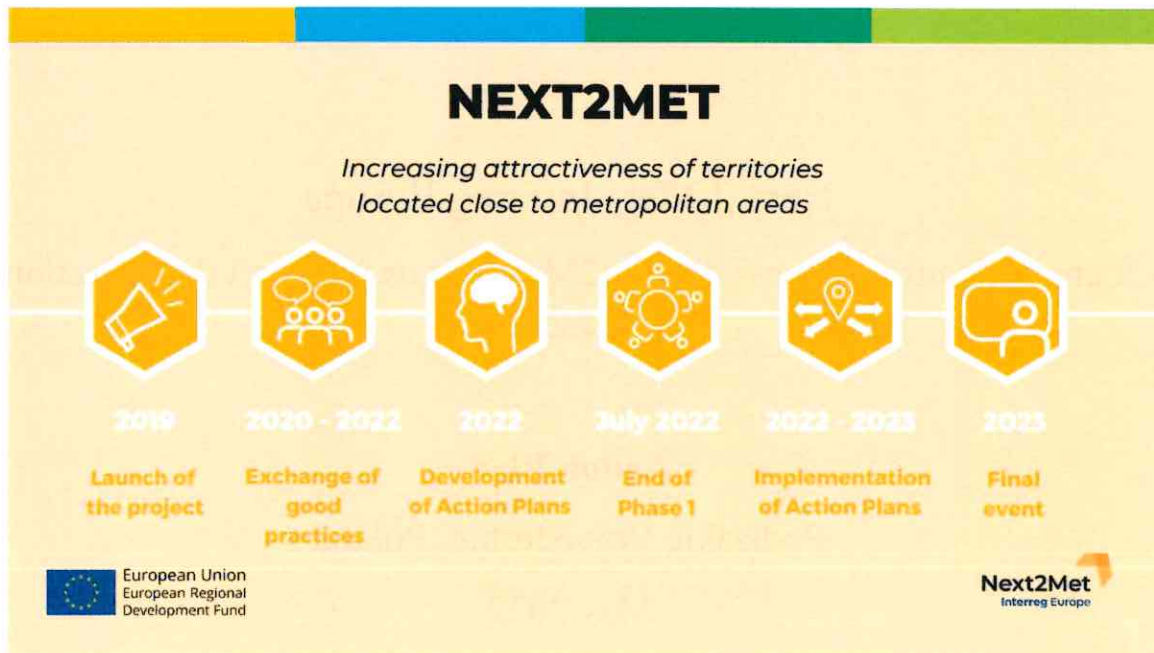
Action Plan

Podlaskie Voivodeship, Poland

May 2022

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Project and Policy Context



Next2Met is an innovative interregional exchange project, co-financed by the Interreg Europe programme, which aims at increasing attractiveness - for knowledge, opportunities, and capital - of territories located close to metropolitan areas.

These areas are confronted with a lack of tools and critical mass of research, development, and innovation, and therefore struggle with keeping experienced small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as highly qualified people in the region.

In this context, Next2Met worked for the improvement of policy instruments through interregional learning processes in **6 different regions**, focusing on **soft digitalisation measures** applied to a variety of sectors such as health care, transport, tourism, and public administration, among others.

These actions, nurtured by the good practices exchange that took place between partners throughout the project's lifetime, are linked to a broader European policy context, which is constantly developing in response to major challenges and crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic.

By improving services and products with the use of technology and digitalisation measures, Next2Met contributes to the **digital and green transition**, helping the territories in reaching the Green Deal

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objectives. Furthermore, the project also addresses the following key goals identified in the European Commission's Communication "[Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade](#)", which sets out digital ambitions for the next decade:

- a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals;
- secure and sustainable digital infrastructures;
- digital transformation of businesses;
- digitalisation of public services.

Digitalisation processes and investments have been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis which brought about a complete shift of perspective and made clear the necessity to foster digital development in numerous sectors. New trends and the use of digital tools in people's daily lives as well as in businesses' operations have emerged in this period and served as useful material and sources of inspiration for the project. As a reaction to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic on society and the way we live and work, the project has oriented its focus towards certain dimensions, already enclosed in its initial approach of "soft digitalisation", such as 360° quality of life, multilocality and hybrid work, citizen participation and inclusion. The connection with citizens and their involvement in territorial development through bottom-up and participative initiatives has been further considered by the Next2Met project because of their relevance in the present context and at European policy level.

In fact, a human-centred perspective is at the core of the European Commission's vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030. In this regard, on 26 January 2022, the Commission proposed an inter-institutional solemn declaration on digital rights and principles for the digital decade, which includes a specific point on citizens' participation in the democratic process at all levels and underlines the importance of citizens' control over their own data.

Indeed, the Next2Met project has been able to adapt to this new context and ultimately benefit from it, by fostering the exchange of good practices among its partner regions and beyond and further implementing digitalisation measures that improve people's lives and increase regional attraction.

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I. General Information

Project	Next2Met
Partner organisation	Podlaskie Voivodeship
Country	Poland
NUTS2 region	Podlaskie

Contact details

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II. Policy Context

<p>The Action Plan aims to impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>Investment for Growth and Jobs programme</u> ➤ European Territorial Cooperation programme ➤ Other regional development policy instrument/s
<p>Name of the policy instrument addressed</p>	<p>Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodeship 2014-2020 (multi-fund ERDF/ESF)</p>

Podlaskie Voivodeship is represented by the self-government of Podlaskie – the Marshal’s Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The mission of the Marshal Office is to create a friendly, well-organized, modern, and efficient council that carries out tasks of the local government’s institutions regarding socio-economic development of Podlaskie Voivodeship and meeting needs of its community.

The Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship (Department of Regional Development) is the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodeship 2014-2020 (ROPPV). ROPPV is one of 16 programmes that is implemented by each local authority in the country. Complementing this grid of programmes dedicated to each voivodeship, are national programmes managed by central (government) institutions.

ROPPV was developed in response to the diagnosed problems in the region. The document describing these issues is Podlaskie Voivodeship Development Strategy 2020. It is prepared and updated by the voivodeship self-government. The programme is financed simultaneously from ERDF and ESF. The objectives of the Podlaskie Regional Operational Programme result from the Podlaskie Development Strategy 2020 adopted in September 2013. These are: development of enterprises, increase in export and profitability of Podlaskie companies, as well as better jobs and better earnings of the inhabitants, i.e. higher quality of life. Support under the ROPPV is available for, among others: research and development activity in enterprises, development of information and communication technologies, creation of investment areas, energy based on renewable sources, education responding to the needs of the regional labour market, activation of the unemployed, prevention of social exclusion.

The programme covers with comprehensive support the areas requiring intervention. This includes the area of digitisation. The programme provides support for this type of project to the amount of 179,320,000 PLN (over 39 million euro), which constitutes 14.78% of the total programme budget under priority axis VIII Infrastructure for public services, type of action 8.1 Development of public services provided by electronic means.

The first calls for proposals were launched in 2015. A summary of the calls and their effects in this regard is presented below.

The analysis of the conducted calls showed what the potential is, the interest in this topic as well as the quality of applications and the understanding of the topic by potential applicants.

Call deadlines	Type of action	Budget	Number of projects	Projects approved for implementation	Budget used
IV-V.2017	Development of electronic services in e-government	6,5 mln EUR	2	0	0,00 EUR

IV-V.2018	Digitalization of resources owned by public institutions and their reuse	2,19 mln EUR	9	0	0,00 EUR
III-IV.2019	Development of electronic services in e-government	4,3 mln EUR	16	5	3,72 mln EUR
VI-VII.2019	Digitalization of resources owned by public institutions and their reuse	0,65 mln EUR	2	1	0,21 mln EUR
VII-VIII.2020	Development of electronic services in administration	7,6 mln EUR	42	15	7,5 mln EUR

When the Next2Met project started in 2019, it was clear what the situation was after the first calls for projects in the area of digitalization. Therefore, several meetings were held among the staff of the Programme Managing Authority to discuss these calls, learned lessons and consider what changes would improve this situation.

When implementing the project during the COVID-19 pandemic, Podlaskie Voivodeship found itself in a completely new reality. It had to change the way the project was implemented and also had to change previous assumptions on how to implement the project. This new situation also provided new opportunities to change the policy. The European Commission decided, in connection with COVID-19, to support recovery measures in the context of the pandemic and its social consequences, and to prepare for the ecological and digital recovery of the economy. To this end, Poland has been allocated additional funds from the REACT-EU. Instrument ROPPV 2014-2020 has been allocated 3.87% of the total allocation earmarked for Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) from the first tranche of REACT-EU, i.e. as much as EUR 14,143,267. These funds are entirely from the ERDF. Within ROPPV 2014-2020, REACT-EU funds have been allocated to the newly created Axis XI Supporting the region's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic (96%) and to Axis XII REACT-EU Technical Assistance (4%).

The additional money will support investments in four areas: health, energy, digitalisation and entrepreneurship. In the first instance, resources will be used to support investments contributing to the transformation towards a green and digital economy.

Under these decisions, the possibility has arisen to mobilise additional resources to support the area of digitisation. The Managing Authority has planned a new call for projects in 2022, which will be funded under REACT-EU.

Therefore, an opportunity has arisen to implement the proposed change and to monitor the effects.

The policy that was revised and has been identified in the project is closely related to the theme of the whole project. It responds to the diagnosed problems and needs of the region and the implemented activities will have a positive impact on this policy, which will improve the attractiveness of the region. Intended effects that are in line with the objectives of the project: it is an increase in public awareness and institutions involved in the implementation of the Policy. The effect of these activities will be a reduction in the distance between residents and offices, easier communication and learning about the real needs of residents.

The experience gained during the project, meetings with partners and exchange of experience have guided action of this Action Plan.

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PÄIJÄT-HÄMEEN LIITTO
The Regional Council of Päijät-Häme



The Business Agency
of Lower Austria



Diputació
Barcelona



Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly



Podlaskie



WITEND



CPMR
CRPM

III. Details of the Actions Envisaged

ACTION 1

The new criterion for selection of projects for development of electronic services in administration

1. Background

Among the many interesting lessons learned during the project, the most inspiring and responding to the need to create more attractive conditions for Podlaskie residents and entrepreneurs was the good practice: “Digital consultations to inform Local Digital Strategies” of the partner from Ireland, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

Longford County Council used digital tools such as Mentimeter and Survey123 for ArcGIS to consult with its citizens in the development of their local Digital Strategy and to overcome challenges of inclusion, participation and engagement of citizens i.e due to a lack of digital infrastructure. Initially the Council consulted with inhabitants using a survey developed in Survey123 for ArcGIS which was advertised through local newspapers, social media and websites. Then Mentimeter was used at workshops that brought key stakeholders together in the region, where participants used their smartphones to complete Mentimeter surveys and polls, voicing their opinions and submitting questions while also spatially identifying areas in need of services via ArcGIS. It allowed policy makers to gather insight, compile data and give survey results in real-time. Longford County Council wanted to ensure that their public consultation captured a wide spectrum of relevant stakeholder viewpoints when developing their Digital Strategy for the County so using Mentimeter, as a tool that represented the anonymity of stakeholders, worked well to ensure everybody participated. The use of these digital tools not only ensured high participation but also avoided the lengthy process of transcribing of notes or carrying out thematic analyses to produce results or report. It was also reported to be a fun and engaging way to consult with communities and to create further dialogue based on the real-time results.

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced people-to-people contacts, including residents and entrepreneurs with institutions. This, in effect, significantly accelerated the development of electronic services in the administration, as in a very short period of time most institutions had to adapt to the changing reality and move their services to the online world. With the development of e-services, there is a growing need to work on their quality and the way of communication with their recipients: residents and entrepreneurs. Effective, two-way communication with recipients of services, thanks to which they can express their opinion on solutions prepared for them or

participate in decision-making processes e.g. of their municipality, makes a given place more attractive to live, where a citizens and entrepreneurs has a real voice in matters that concern them and their families or companies.

The development of electronic services provides more and more simple, effective and attractive online tools, such as online forms and surveys, which make communication more effective. And this is what the good practice presented by the partner from Ireland has shown. The use of simple and intuitive data gathering digital solutions, that make creating, sharing and analysing surveys possible, is an effective way to carry out consultations with stakeholders.

This good practice has inspired Podlaskie Voivodeship to use similar online tools in the process of collecting opinions from different groups of stakeholders, but also, most importantly, to draw attention and encourage other public institutions in the Podlaskie region to use such online solutions which can facilitate effective communication with the citizens and entrepreneurs and consult important issues with them. The sharing of experiences by the Irish partner regarding his good practice was very helpful and enabled the preparation and implementation of this action plan. In addition, during Next2Met Policy Learning Event #4 on May 26, 2021, organized by Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, Podlaskie Voivodeship had the opportunity to speak with Lorraine O'Connor from Regeneration Officer Longford County Council, who shared with them her experiences and opinions about conducting digital consultations with county residents.

2. Action

This Action Plan covers **1 action**: the new criterion for selection of projects for development of electronic services in administration, and **is implemented in 4 steps**. The development and implementation of this Action Plan is carried out by the Department of Regional Development, the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

1 ACTION ↓ 4 STEPS

Step 1	May 2021 – December 2021	Testing digital tools by the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship
Step 2	December 2021	The new projects selection criterion

Step 3	February 2022	Conference "Development of e-services in Podlaskie Voivodeship - opportunities and examples"
Step 4	February – September 2022	The call for proposal and evaluation



Step 1: Testing digital tools by the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship

The Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, inspired by the good practice: "Digital consultations to inform Local Digital Strategies" decided to learn more about the functionalities of online tools available on the commercial market and to test their usefulness during meetings and public consultations. For this purpose, on May 6, 2021, online meetings were organized with representatives of 2 companies providing popular online applications, who presented the possibilities of such applications. There is a wide possibilities offered by this type of online tools to easily create forms, polls, slides, surveys, quizzes and images. They simplify the process of collecting opinions from stakeholders, who using a computer or smartphone can answer the questions asked in the questionnaires, share their opinions and ask questions. It facilitates communication with stakeholders and enables immediate collection and display of data in real time, in attractive and interactive way.

The Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship started to test and use different type of digital tools to collect opinions during different types of meetings and conferences as well as by conducting online surveys on the Marshal's Office website. Examples of the use of digital tools:

- **10.12.2021** – Next2Met Policy Learning Event #5 – Good practices in the Podlaskie Region,
- 12.01.2022 – the online meeting for public consultation of the Interreg VI-A Lithuania - Poland Programme 2021-2027,
- 05 - 11.01.2022 - voting by the Competition Jury to choose a motto to promote the program European Funds for Podlaskie 2021-2027,
- **18.01.2022** - the public meeting, organized as part of the public consultation of the draft program European Funds for Podlaskie 2021-2027,
- **24.02.2022** – the online Conference "Development of e-services in Podlaskie Voivodeship - opportunities and examples"
- **Online registration form for individual consultations** for applicants on the scope of the planned project before submitting an application for funding under the 2014-2020 RPPD Priority Axis XI Supporting the

recovery of the region's economy from the COVID-19 pandemic Measure 11.1 Supporting the recovery of the region's economy from the COVID-19 pandemic, Project type 2: Development of electronic services in administration Call no: RPPD. 11.01.00-IZ.00-20-002/22.

STEP 2

Step 2: The new projects selection criterion

Testing of the digital tools confirmed their effectiveness, attractiveness and ease of obtaining information and opinions. Therefore, the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship decided to find a way to encourage other public institutions in Podlaskie region to use this form of communication with residents and entrepreneurs. The opportunity presented itself in the additional funds from the REACT-EU instrument, within the Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodeship for 2014-2020 and upcoming call for proposals for the development of electronic services in administration, addressed to the public institutions in Podlaskie region. During the preparation of documentation for this call, a proposal was made to add a new projects selection criterion that would encourage public institutions to implement digital tools facilitating communication with citizens and entrepreneurs as part of the planned projects. **On December 20, 2021 the Monitoring Committee of the ROPPV 2014-2020 adopted a new projects selection criterion**, which will reward projects for additional functionality of planned solutions in the form of an online consultation service with users (inhabitants / entrepreneurs):

„Online consultation service with users (inhabitants / entrepreneurs) in terms of their opinions, comments and proposals, aimed at introducing improvements tailored to the real user needs”

Thanks to this change, applicants (public institutions) will be able to finance the purchase of this kind of digital tools and will also receive additional 4 points (out of a maximum of 100 points) for implementing such solutions in their projects. On the other hand, not fulfilling this criterion, will not result in good projects not receiving funding at all.

On February 8, 2022 the call for proposals was announced and the information and documentation regarding the call, including the Project Selection Criteria can be found on the ROPPV website:

https://rpo.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/jak_skorzystac_z_programu/zobacz_ogloszenia_i_wyniki_na_1/dzialanie-111-wspieranie-odbudowy-gospodarki-regionu-w-zwiazku-z-pandemia-covid-19.html

STEP 3

Step 3: Conference "Development of e-services in Podlaskie Voivodeship - opportunities and examples"

The experience of previous calls for proposals regarding the development of public services provided electronically has shown a growing interest in the subject of digitalization of public institutions in the Podlaskie region. However, they also showed that a large part of the submitted applications did not receive funding. Therefore, to guide potential applicants, provide detailed information about the possibility of applying for funds under the announced call for proposals, as well as to inspire public institutions from Podlaskie region with the idea of implementing digital tools to facilitate effective communication with the residents and entrepreneurs, **on February 24, 2022 the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship organized the Conference "Development of e-services in Podlaskie Voivodeship - opportunities and examples"**. This event was addressed primarily to public institutions from the Podlaskie voivodeship, which can apply under the announced call. To reach as many potential interested parties as possible, on the website of the Marshal's Office was published an article about the conference along with an online registration form, and were sent by e-mail invitations to the conference to all local government institutions in the region.

This online event gathered about 80 participants, and it was opened by Joanna Sarosiek, director of the Department of Regional Development of the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, who introduced the participants to the purpose of the event. In the first part of the Conference, Katarzyna Kitlas, deputy director of Department of Regional Development, described the conditions of applying for funds for the Development of electronic services in administration and she indicated the differences compared to previous calls for proposals of this type, including a new project selection criterion. She pointed out, that the new criterion is the result of the Next2Met project and inspiration from the good practice of the Irish partner. Participants were also informed that for those applicants who would like to consult the planned projects, individual consultations have been launched, which can be registered through an online form on the Office's website.

During the Conference, a short online survey was conducted to get some information about the participants, whether they had already benefited from funds for the development of electronic services and what kind of support they are interested in under the announced call.

In the next part of the event, participants of the meeting could also hear about examples of well-implemented projects in the area of digitization in the Podlaskie voivodship, which were told by the invited representatives from:

Książnica Podlaska in Białystok – provincial self-government cultural institution, which is the largest library in the region of north-eastern Poland, the library operates within the Main Library and a network of 16 library branches located in various districts of Białystok;

Powiat Starosty in Sokółka – a local government unit, 1 out of 14 powiats in the Podlaskie voivodship – the second largest after the Białystok powiat.

Invited guests from the Książnica Podlaska in Białystok talked about the third edition of the "Treasury of culture ..." project, thanks to which the library's resources were digitized and representative from Powiat Starosty in Sokółka described the development of electronic services in the administration of the Sokolka powiat.

The Conference was also an opportunity for participants to ask questions concerning both the call for proposals and the presented good practices.

Step 4: The call for proposal and evaluation

STEP 4

Under the additional funds from the REACT-EU instrument, within the Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodship for 2014-2020, **on February 8, 2022, there was announced the call for proposals** within Priority Axis XI Supporting the recovery of the region's economy in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic Measure 11.1. Supporting the recovery of the region's economy in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic Project type 2.

Development of electronic services in administration. Call number: RPPD. 11.01.00-IZ.00-20-002/22.

The competition is addressed to the units of local government and their unions, agreements and associations, as well as government administration with regard to projects of a regional scope only.

Within the framework of the competition, the support will be given to undertakings aimed at the development of electronic services in administration in the Podlaskie Voivodship, in the scope including in particular:

- a) updating and integrating the catalogue of provided e-services - including digitalization of new services or improving the functionality and e-maturity of the existing services; ensuring integration of the provided e-services with the services available through the ePUAP platform; preparation of document templates and electronic forms;
- b) promotion of public administration e-services (only as an element of the project);
- c) providing access to the resources of public registers to other public entities and administration clients via electronic means;
- d) purchase and implementation of applications/software ensuring electronic accessibility of the office and its services for people with disabilities and minority communities as one of the elements of the project a) – c);
- e) development of the necessary IT infrastructure in administration as one of the project elements a) - c), including in particular purchase, implementation and expansion of applications and database systems, to improve of management effectiveness and disseminate electronic communication in public institutions.

Total allocation for this call for proposal: **20 000 000 PLN (4 351 610.10 EUR** - after conversion into euro according to the rate published on the InforEuro for January 2022).

In accordance with the planned Competition Regulations, the project selection procedure will include the following stages:

Stage 1: Announcement of the call for proposals: February 2022,

Stage 2: Call for applications: March – April 2022,

Stage 3: Verification of applications in terms of formal conditions: April – May 2022,

Stage 4: Formal and substantive assessment of applications: May – July 2022,

Stage 5: Adjudication of the competition and selection of projects for co-financing: August 2022,

Stage 6: Announcement of results: August 2022,

Stage 7: Signing of the Project Co-financing Agreement: September 2022.

The results of the formal and substantive evaluation of applications will show how many institutions have decided to implement online consultation services with users as part of the planned development of electronic services.

3. Players involved

Department of Regional Development, Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship

4. Timeframe

May 2021 – September 2022

5. Costs

No costs are expected. Both the implemented and the remaining activities do not require additional funding and are carried out within the framework of the own tasks of the Marshal's Office of Podlaskie Voivodeship using equipment and software owned by the office.

6. Funding sources

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7. Monitoring and indicators

The process of implementing the action and its results will be monitored by the Department of Regional Development of Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The main result indicator, that will be monitored and evaluated during the implementation of the step 4 (after the formal and substantive assessment of applications) is: **the number of projects that received points for the new projects selection criterion.**

This indicator will reflect the interest of public institutions in the Podlaskie region in implementing an online consultation service - it will show how many institutions, both those that will receive and those that will not receive funding, have included such a service in their planned projects. The analysis of the proposals and planned solutions will show the level of interest and awareness of public institutions of the possibilities of facilitating communication with citizens and/or entrepreneurs through digital tools. If the results of the conducted analysis confirm the potential and interest of public institutions in such a form of communication, there is a strong probability that this project selection criterion will be included in the next funding period.

Date	2022 -06- 13
Signature	<p>DYREKTOR Departamentu Rozwoju Regionalnego</p>  <p>Joanna Sarosiek</p>
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