

Post 2027 Discussion Paper

Additional elements

5 November 2024

Please note | This discussion paper was produced for the Post 2027 Harvesting event, taking place in Brussels on 25-26 November 2024. It is a tool to stimulate discussion and engagement on the topic. **It does not represent an opinion of Interact, Interreg or any other actor.** For more information about the Harvesting process, please see the Post 2027 section of [Interact.eu](https://interact.eu)

Additional elements to contribute to the future of Interreg

In addition to the seven prioritised discussion elements, Interact has used the many events organised in 2024 to discuss the key issues in implementation. The below points bring together the few disparate points not collected into the other discussions. While these points are separate to the seven discussion topics, they are nevertheless important to the future of Interreg.

Data in Interreg, it is working, but has still opportunity to improve

Future monitoring system

Despite having 86 programmes hosted in differing organisations and countries, the majority of programmes are supported by a singular monitoring system, the **Joint Electronic Monitoring System (Jems)**. Developed by Interact, but co-created with Interreg programmes, Jems is built on the harmonised and simplified agreements achieved by HIT (Harmonised Implementation Tools).

A jointly developed community system is seen as the most economical way to build a monitoring system, in addition to direct procurement savings, it also facilitates and enables greater harmonisation of programme procedures, which in turn reduces the administrative burden on applicants, as well as others involved in the management of Interreg programmes (i.e. Auditors and Controllers).

The current monitoring system was designed for continued use into the next period, so significant changes to the basic premise of managing programmes would threaten this, and mean another significant investment of time, money and resources would be needed. While the system will need an update for the new period generally, further changes to the regulatory environment will require additional updates to meet any new requirements. This could either be done individually by each programme, or centrally by Interact subject to resources and other constraints.

Interreg at the forefront of common indicators

The close collaboration between Interact, Interreg and the European Semester Unit (ESU) on the use of Indicators in Interreg has been a powerful collaboration. In spite of the specificities of Interreg, 90% of the indicators used in the 2021-2027 period are common.

Most of the indicators work well, but a few need to be adjusted in the period ahead. The close collaboration between Interreg evaluation officers facilitated by Interact and supported by ESU is welcome, and is key to making these revisions successful.

The use of common indicators, and the positive approach to them is a symbolic representation of the cooperation mindset. Programmes are not seeking to build islands, but to build a community of shared knowledge, transferrable solutions and best practice.

Interreg data management

In spite of the common monitoring system, and a common reporting tool (SFC), **data movements** are not efficient or streamlined. There is a strong potential to improve this in the future period and achieve both a reduction in the burden on programmes, as well as improving the accuracy and reliability of data on Interreg, which is hosted on platforms such as keep.eu, Kohesio and the Open Data Platform.

In this context, Interact is also exploring a new BI dashboard tool, Index, which is in an experimental phase during the current period. The tool enables automated data exchange and visualisation across programmes, from the application phase onward. This approach presents a learning opportunity to assess how automated, real-time data integration might support more efficient fund management, help prevent duplicate funding, and foster stronger synergies between programmes. The insights gained through Index's experimental use guide considerations for more integrated data solutions in future periods.¹

In particular, having a more foresighted approach to reporting and transmitting data would be advantageous for all. While in general continuity is preferred, it was suggested that **two data movements per annum** would reduce the overall burden for transmitting data to the various places it is required. In doing this, it would enable a stronger focus on what should be transmitted at this point, and reduce the need for more frequent, disparate calls for information and updates.

In planning for two larger data movements it could also be possible to be more holistic in considering what is needed to be reported at all. For instance, fields that are not relevant, already recorded or being retrievable from other registers should not need to be inputted.

More **automated data transmissions, built on clear templates**, with harmonised and standardised field titles and more, could also further reduce complexity and ensure a more regular understanding of what has been achieved in real-time. This would also address another challenge, of ensuring data is always available in an open and machine-readable format without additional administrative burden.

Such a standardised transmission would enable databases like **keep.eu** to pick up the reported data and quickly provide more updated information for those who should know what is being funded. In this way, keep.eu would be able to provide a timely overview of implementation, in calls (as required by Art 49, 2 CPR) as well as of contracted partners. There would also be the opportunity to consider other such data (i.e. EU funding volume committed to projects) to ensure that there is reliable data on the implementation of programmes. This overview would enable programmes, national authorities and the Commission to benchmark the implementation of Interreg programmes, and to understand the reality of implementation.

Such a forward-looking approach would naturally use **basic data transmission and management tools**, such as ETL (Extract, Transform and Load) systems, as well as APIs from monitoring systems such as Jems.

A data-based vision for the future

Whilst being aware of administrative and technical limitations, it is possible to have future Interreg programmes using forward looking monitoring software designed for multi-period use, to provide better quality and more reliable data.

This would create a singular overview of where Interreg is in implementation, with 86 programmes updating the picture every six months, alongside more automated live data exchange build on simple harmonised templates. This would enable the programmes to understand their timeline in the context of programmes around them.

It would also enable the wider Interreg community to be able to point to its local contribution, in a wider context of where all Interreg is working locally, and in the context of wider efforts on the policy priorities of the European Union.

¹ Paragraph added 05 November 2024, 15:38 CET

Visibility of Interreg

What is working

The general approach to communication in the regulatory is appreciated, especially the **harmonised Interreg Brand**. The option to combine the EU emblem, funding statement, programme name and project name is strongly supported. It is also vital to ensure the visibility of Interreg as a funding stream and to keep building a harmonised approach within Interreg, and within the European Union.

What needs improvement

The introduction of **Operations of Strategic Importance** in Annex 3 caused some confusion. While the rules on those over the financial limit are clear, many projects under the financial threshold are not designated as OSIs. Should OSIs continue in the future, more discussion with programmes ahead of the drafting stage would help to build a better shared understanding of how Interreg can best respond to the intention behind OSIs, and to make sure the right projects are designated as such, even when the financial volume is limited.

Championing sustainable practices

Sustainability has been a key focus in this programming period, with significant Interreg resources directed toward environmental projects. However, current regulations do not require programmes and projects to fully integrate sustainability into the planning and implementation. Instead, there are conflicting priorities where sustainability must coexist with other objectives, such as competitiveness or regional development. This can lead to sustainability being approached as a box-checking requirement rather than a guiding principle. Additionally, it is challenging to monitor the environmental impact of projects².

The need to strengthen sustainability within Interreg interventions was raised during the Interreg Knowledge Fair session³ and further discussed in a May 2024 webinar⁴.

A noticeable trend shows that some programmes are moving beyond basic compliance to the horizontal requirements and are offering guidance, organising workshops, and providing structured support for sustainability. However, many programmes still lack the resources and support necessary to adopt a more holistic approach. The shift is challenging, as it requires behavioural change among those who plan and implement projects sustainably and who ensure sustainable use of project results.

Considerations for post 2027

There is a need for discussion and decisions on how to embed sustainability more holistically into the programme and project lifecycle and to support programmes in adopting sustainable project and programme management approaches.

Currently, the environmental impact of Interreg projects to climate change is not systematically monitored, though it could be valuable to do so as an awareness raising tool at least. For example, Euro-MED programme is testing a carbon footprint calculator integrated into Jems and project partners are obliged to use it. This tool was presented during Interact events and were perceived in general positively.

² This is especially true in case of projects for climate change adaptation according to the European Court of Auditors. Often reporting is largely descriptive and lacks quantifiable data and does not currently allow for evaluation of progress. [NEWS-SR-2024-15 | European Court of Auditors](#)

³ <https://interact.eu/library/232>

⁴ <https://interact.eu/events/107>

In the context of Interreg, principles like DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) and SEA are often treated as formalities or “tick-the-box” requirements, with limited emphasis on promoting positive contributions and competing with other conflicting priorities. Therefore, it should be assessed how these can be prioritised as guiding principles in the context of Interreg.

Maritime cooperation

The maritime dimension of Interreg

Interreg programs engage with the maritime dimension by aligning with Sea Basin Strategies, the Blue Economy pillars of Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS), and collaborating with international organizations. Many programs focus on specific marine and maritime activities, such as issuing targeted calls for maritime projects, and they promote synergies across various related programs. The significance of implementing directives like the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Maritime Spatial Planning Directives is widely recognized, enhancing maritime cooperation and coordination. However, some programs do not explicitly cover maritime cooperation in their core activities, highlighting variability in engagement levels across different Interreg regions.

Driving Economic Growth through Maritime Cooperation in Interreg Programmes

Interreg programs support economic development through maritime cooperation by promoting blue economy projects, enhancing skills training, and fostering innovation across marine industries. Examples include initiatives like feasibility studies for marine monitoring, joint research in blue economy sectors, digital solutions for coastal tourism, renewable energy investments, and cross-border collaborations on environmental conservation and marine spatial planning. Specific projects such as the development of guest harbors, reducing sea pollution, and sustainable tourism in maritime regions further highlight Interreg's role in strengthening the economic potential of coastal and maritime communities.

What needs improvement?

To enhance maritime cooperation and address border obstacles, Interreg should better recognize the maritime dimension across cross-border and transnational programs, balancing focus on both coastal (NUTS III) and land-sea (NUTS II) interactions. Treating the sea as an equal border to land and integrating blue policies alongside green strategies is essential. Increased political awareness and stakeholder involvement in maritime policy are needed, along with greater visibility of maritime boundaries on Interreg platforms and improved regulatory awareness. Flexibility in programming, better governance, removal of legal barriers, and support for smaller organizations can help maximize cooperation potential and address unique maritime challenges

Key messages for the future of maritime cooperation in Interreg

1. The sea should be seen as a logical, connecting border, similar to land borders, promoting seamless cooperation across regions that share a maritime boundary.
2. Maritime cooperation adds value by tackling joint challenges such as marine litter reduction, coastal management, and sustainable aquaculture, benefiting economic development and environmental preservation.
3. Future programmes should define and implement functional area and local integrated strategies that are specific to maritime regions, addressing unique needs and opportunities within these areas.
4. The maritime space involves complex interactions across natural and human dimensions, requiring tailored approaches to governance and collaboration that foster shared responsibility and innovative solutions.
5. Interreg should adopt flexible eligibility criteria and develop specific indicators to measure the impact of maritime projects accurately, reflecting the distinct characteristics of maritime cooperation.

6. Maritime cooperation in sea basins allows diverse territories to work together on transboundary issues, enhancing overall regional cohesion, security, and sustainability.
7. Clear distinctions should be made between marine cooperation (focused on ecological and resource conservation) and maritime cooperation (focused on economic and infrastructural activities) for more targeted support.

Disclaimer: Cooperation can be complex, and while Interact's job is to make it easier, Interact cannot offer assurances on the accuracy of our pan-European information in any specific context.

Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

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