

# Post 2027 Discussion Paper

## Synergies and cooperation

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)

## Improving synergies among Interreg programmes and other funds and policies

### Overview

The current Interreg regulation preamble emphasises synergies and complementarities between different strands, with efforts already underway to foster cooperation between transnational and cross-border programmes in shared geographical areas.

Looking ahead to post-2027<sup>1</sup>, there's a pressing need for increased efforts to enhance effectiveness and territorial impact. Interreg, as a key component of Cohesion Policy, is uniquely positioned to address territorial interdependencies and minimise the "border effect" in functional border areas. Its success hinges on considering the territorial dimension of investments, coordinating funds and policies at various levels, and creating a holistic strategy that unites competitiveness, cohesion, and other EU policies. While some Interreg programmes are initially engaging with initiatives aligned to other EU funds (such as IJG, Horizon Europe, and Just Transition), there is a growing recognition that programmes should work strategically and pursue collaboration ties for synergy development. Current Interreg experiences can offer valuable insights into ensuring better alignment and cooperation among these funds, avoiding overlaps, but there's still significant room for improvement in fostering complementarities and synergies for future funding efficiency. These experiences highlight both the potential and the challenges in ensuring better coordination among various funding mechanisms.

Given this landscape and the challenges ahead, a critical question emerges: How can Interreg programmes most efficiently and effectively leverage their unique position to enhance synergies across EU funds and maximise the territorial impact of funding in the post-2027 period?

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy, February 2024*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/974536> and [Inforegio - Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion \(europa.eu\)](https://interreg.europa.eu/interreg/interreg-9th-report)

## Methodology

The information serving basis for this document has been collected through various events and activities:

- Interreg survey (August-September 2024)
- Interreg Knowledge Fair 2024 surveys and sessions<sup>2</sup> (March 2024)
- Interact facilitated networks and events, such as the MedLab Annual Meeting (June 2024), the Network meeting of Heads of MA/JS and Communication officers of Interreg transnational programmes (October 2024), and the Network of Interreg transnational programmes supporting the implementation of the MRS. Capitalisation workshops organised by Interact (November 2023, May 2024, October 2024) and by national authorities (France November 2023, October 2024, Italy July 2024), Cooperation actions workshop (July 2024).

## What is working

- The benefits of working in synergies are clear. Significant knowledge and experiences have already been gathered, and **capitalisation approaches and thematic clusters** have been designed and implemented as one of the main ways to ensure synergies (e.g. Interreg Central Europe past call for projects aims to coordinate Interreg and Horizon 2020 partners to transfer project results into practical applications in the Central European region. Additionally, the programme will test improving synergies between transnational and cross-border projects through a dedicated call, “capitalisation through coordination”, to tackle disparities and negative effects of national and inner borders on functional linkages among central European regions. The Interreg Arctic (NPA) is a partnership between the Interreg Aurora, Interreg NPA and ENI programmes designed to enhance visibility, improve coordination, and create synergies. Both programmes NPA and Aurora, have designed a joint call for [Clustering projects](#) to be launched in the autumn of 2025. The [Multi-programme Coordination Mechanism](#) Action Plan (2024-2025)<sup>3</sup> was approved by seven Interreg programme monitoring committees to jointly identify, communicate, transfer and advocate the best results on sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean. In the [Baltic Sea Region project platforms](#), projects from Interreg Baltic Sea Region and other funding programmes from a similar thematic field can join forces. [Interreg Europe’s Policy Learning Platform](#) established to boost EU-wide policy learning and capitalisation on practices from regional development policies. Interact support through facilitating thematic and policy working groups on the different policy objectives (Smarter Europe, [Greener Europe](#), [More Social Europe](#) and Better Governance) to foster knowledge exchange and strengthen the collection and communication of Interreg results and impacts within EU policies. (Please see the annex to this discussion paper for more detailed inputs by Interreg).
- **Collaboration with other Interreg programmes on administrative aspects and improving operational efficiency** in daily practice (e.g. Interreg France-Wallonia: Adoption of operational best practices from nearby programmes, like Interreg Flanders-Netherlands, IPA Hungary-Serbia: Collaboration in drafting key documents (e.g., subsidy contracts) and sharing

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<sup>2</sup> “Cooperation and synergies with other EU funds and instruments” and “Having more impact: Stronger cooperation between CBC and TN”, “The future of IJG cooperation actions”

<sup>3</sup> The mechanism also foresees shared terms of reference The involved programmes are Interreg EuroMed, Interreg NextMed, Italy-Croatia, Italy-France Maritime, Greece-Cyprus, Italy-Malta, and Italy-Tunisia, with IPA South Adriatic and IPA Adriatic-Ionian as observers, and support from Interact.

management structures with other programmes sharing the same MA Hungary-Slovakia, Hungary-Croatia, NEXT Hungary-Romania-Slovakia-Ukraine programme. Interreg ALCOTRA (France-Italy): Benchmarking best practices from other French Interreg programmes for small-scale projects and operational tools, particularly territorial instruments<sup>4</sup>.

- **Networking events (e.g. IKF), study visits, joint communication Campaigns (e. SLAM, European Cooperation Day) and knowledge exchanges** are ensured under Interact's services.
- **Sharing of information during project selection** is facilitated to minimise overlaps, avoid duplication, and align strategic goals (e.g. Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine with other Interreg Next programmes; sharing practical experiences and administrative approaches during project selection e.g. Interreg Germany-Denmark exchanging evaluations with other national ERDF funds. Interreg Baltic Sea Region and Interreg Estonia-Latvia are already using Index.eu to prevent overlap in project selection, ensuring complementary projects across programmes.
- In parallel, the **project's and partners' own initiative** is naturally developing and existing, led by the project partners. However, there is a potential for doing more and better. (e.g. In the field of energy transition and the role of local communities in the decarbonisation of energy with [CREATORS](#) from H2020 and Interreg North Sea's project [COPPER](#))
- **EU Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) and Sea Basin Strategies (SBS)** show to be a valuable opportunity to foster synergies across various funding programmes, particularly Interreg, by providing strategic frameworks that align regional challenges and opportunities. Their added value lies in guiding cross-border cooperation, enhancing policy alignment, and engaging stakeholders beyond traditional Interreg beneficiary groups. By addressing shared challenges and pooling resources across sectors and territories, MRS/SBS amplifies the impact of cooperation efforts. (Please see the annex to this discussion paper for more detailed inputs by Interreg).
- **Synergies between Interreg and the Investments for Jobs and Growth (IJG)** programmes have been challenging, but recent efforts show progress. Interreg programmes show maturity, and they are trying to improve integration with Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs). For example, Interreg Baltic Sea Region (BSR) platforms invite IJG partners and engage with the Baltic ESF Managing Authorities to promote collaboration. Similarly, the Interreg Atlantic Area facilitates a network of Managing Authorities from both programmes. A key case is the Prespes cross-border cooperation (CBC) and sustainable development actions around Prespes Lake, supported by Interreg Greece-North Macedonia (2014-2027), IPA funds, ROP Western Macedonia, and national funding. Joint operations have been planned to improve the border crossing and promote regional development.
- During this programming period, Interact has accompanied, facilitated, and animated **geographical networks** to improve synergies and transnational and cross-border collaboration in the same area. The networks are the following: [Atlantic Area](#), [Baltic Sea](#), [Central and South East Europe](#), [Mediterranean \(MedLab\)](#) and [North West Europe area](#) to start. As for the MedLab, it also supports programme self-initiatives for synergies as Multiprogramme Coordination Mechanism and EUSAIR Action Lab. While all these networks share the same overall goal, they each use different approaches, engage with different kinds of stakeholders, and carry out activities tailored to the specific needs of the programme's geography. Additionally, the timing of

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<sup>4</sup> Supported by the French Cohesion and Territorial Agency "ANCT"

their efforts varies across regions. Flexibility and adaptability have been crucial for the smooth functioning of these networks.

- A key focus is on fostering regional cooperation and synergy between [Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA](#) programmes, allowing them to tackle shared challenges, share knowledge, and promote sustainable development aligned with EU standards
- Interact, in close cooperation with Interreg programmes, has been developing tools for synergies. In addition to publications on the topic that provide practical suggestions, the data exchange platform **Index.eu** has been developed. Index.eu enables automated data exchange across programmes in a shared geographical area. It helps programmes monitor partner engagement in applications and projects and spot potential synergies early on across shared territories. There are currently three pilot initiatives implemented, allowing live data exchange between programmes in the Baltic Sea Region, the Mediterranean area, and across IPA programmes.

The general conclusion emphasised the importance of maintaining what works well in the current legal framework regarding flexibility and adaptability, with the possibility of introducing minor adjustments to enhance it further.

### What is missing and needs further improvements

1. Improved **harmonisation and simplification** of administrative processes to enable easier collaboration across EU funds. More substantial harmonisation of methodological questions, particularly involving the responsible Directorates-General of the European Commission.
2. Appropriate **resource allocation** to boost and implement work in synergies across programmes/funds and projects. Extra time for building substantial complementarities. Increased technical assistance for synergy-related activities.
3. More substantial **capacity building**: supporting robust knowledge-sharing framework across programmes, more exchanges and mutual learning initiatives, e.g. capacity-building initiatives for staff working on synergies or training programmes on synergy creation, management, monitoring and evaluation.
4. Better **use of tools and platforms**, like Index.eu, keep.eu and/or other platforms. Improved data collection and analysis tools for assessing synergy impacts.
5. **Conceptual clarity**: more harmonised and unambiguous definitions for terms like “synergies”, “embedding”, and “capitalisation”, in addition to supporting a common understanding of key concepts behind these terms across all relevant stakeholders.
6. **Roles and responsibilities** for Interreg stakeholders and definition of governance to enhance synergies are not sufficiently explicit:
  - some refer to the need for better work specification between strands, particularly across Interreg A and B programmes;
  - defined roles for member state representatives in the programmes, Managing Authorities and Joint Secretariats; as European Commission, who supports the programming, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of EU funding programmes
  - enhance the role of project partners for on-ground synergy creation and implementation;
  - Interact remaining as a facilitator for cross-programme synergies and collaboration;
7. **Missing Interreg's visibility on the impact** and relevance to contributing to the generic EU policies. Interreg is not “seen” by other funds.
8. There is a need for a more **strategic approach** to creating synergies across all funds/programmes, not only Interreg. If working in synergies with other EU funds/programmes and projects (in Interreg

and beyond) would become valuable, the Commission and EU legislators need to develop a more integrated and strategic approach to EU funding, starting from the programming, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes.

9. Need to explore further linkages between **Interreg programmes and local/regional strategies**.
10. Exploiting existing **strategic territorial frameworks MRS and SBS**. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen MRS/SBS's strategic efforts to realise these frameworks fully and build more synergies. This means stepping up their role as active governance platforms, increasing their visibility, and driving more targeted thematic collaboration with funding programmes in the geographical area. By evolving into dynamic governance platforms, MRS/SBS can drive greater policy integration, support project capitalisation, and ensure that results are embedded in regional strategies, leading to long-term investment and impact. However, MRS/SBS are not fully exploiting opportunities offered by EU funds and Interreg programmes beyond transnational Interreg programmes overlapping with the territories of the MRS or SBS.

### What would be your vision for the future? Key messages

#### Integrating Synergy Efforts into Long-Term Strategic Planning and Programme Collaboration.

1. For Post-2027, linking synergy efforts should be considered a **long-term planning** process and an integral part of the programme strategy. Currently, some Interreg programmes see working in synergies with others as an opportunity, and they are exploring ways to create synergies with other EU programmes, funds, or initiatives, all aimed at enhancing territorial cooperation and cohesion. These synergies often occur across programmes, funds, and projects. While the potential for Interreg projects to naturally discover synergies with other funded initiatives should continue, it is clear that fostering these connections **cannot remain solely Interreg's responsibility**. Therefore, **Interreg's recognition and visibility for supporting synergies should increase**. Therefore, most programmes favour including a reference or list of programmes, funds, or institutions in an Interreg guidance document but prefer that such collaboration be voluntary rather than mandatory. However, most programmes support referencing Interreg in other funds, policies, and regulations. It is seen as an enhancement for increased collaboration across EU funds/programmes.
2. **MRS and SBS can be further exploited for more synergies and resource streamlining for territorial benefit**. To do so, MRS/SBS would need to promote these frameworks as a joint long-term vision for geographical areas, fostering stronger political ownership and aligning this vision with future collaboration with Interreg and other EU funds and programmes. MRS/SBS stakeholders could assume their active role in further intensifying structured dialogues with various funds/programmes, reinforcing collaboration on projects to create synergies, and ensuring the policy-level uptake, sustainability, and visibility of project results by highlighting Interreg contributions in their communication activities. The transnational Interreg programmes overlapping with the territories of the MRS are well recognised and have a unique role; the full potential of other Interreg programmes is not exploited.
3. Putting the **territory on focus**, the supporting **role of Interreg**, and **better coordination with IJG programmes**.

#### Practical Implementation & Support for Synergies

4. Working on synergies within the programmes makes sense, but it is not easy and **requires appropriate resources**. Providing additional **incentives** such as appropriate allocation, dedicated staff, awards and recognition, along with **more guidance and tools, capacity building** and other relevant, could significantly contribute to synergies for more effective and efficient use of EU funding.
5. Several programmes emphasise **capitalising on previous project results to foster synergies**. Including **capitalisation as part of the project cycle** can ease this process

## Conceptual and diversity of roles clarity

6. **Conceptual clarity and defining roles and responsibilities for guidance.** Concepts<sup>5</sup> for synergies, capitalisation, and embedding are all related, but there are key differences **that programmes need to clarify.**
7. **Define roles and responsibilities** for supporting synergies between all Interreg programmes' governance stakeholders and programme bodies, including MAs, JSs, MC), the European Commission, and existing strategic territorial frameworks, like MRS/SBS. A definition and division of responsibilities across Interreg strands might improve efficiency. Interreg programmes should strengthen the **partnership role** within synergies with other programmes and funds, accompanying the partners' knowledge of the policy, topics, and territory.

## Flexible approach

8. **One size does not fit all** and programme specificity should be considered. Most programmes call for **flexibility**, while all acknowledge synergies are essential for more efficient and effective cooperation. **Although** there is no unanimity on the range synergies should appear or not in future regulation, there seems to be a **slight preference for non-binding guidance and more incentives over a mandatory approach.**

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<sup>5</sup> **Synergies in Interreg:** Working together makes things better. When programs or funds team up, they can do more than they could alone by sharing what they have and working as one. **Capitalisation in Interreg:** Learning from success. It's about taking good ideas from one project and sharing them so others can use them too. This means gathering information about what worked well and telling others about it. **Embedding in Interreg:** Making good ideas stick. When a project comes up with something useful, embedding means making that idea a regular part of how things are done in regions, countries, or the EU. This helps the good ideas continue to help people even after the project ends.

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