

Post 2027 Discussion Paper

Synergies and cooperation | Annex MRS and SBS

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)

Interreg, EU macro-regional and Sea basin strategies - frameworks unlocking mutual benefits

Overview

EU Macro-regional Strategies (MRS) and Sea Basin Strategies (SBS) are vital territorial frameworks, offering strategic guidance for investments and cooperation. Recognised in key EU regulations (ETC, ESF+, Just Transition, ERDF, IPA, NDICI), they mandate Interreg programmes to contribute to their objectives.

Recent years have highlighted the complementarity between strategies and Interreg, and especially four transnational Interreg programmes, exemplifying mutual benefits in fostering territorial cohesion, policy change, and sustainable regional development. However, further efforts are needed to fully capitalise on these synergies and extend their impact across all Interreg programmes and strategies.

This document builds on feedback from Interreg collected during events in 2024, including the Interreg Knowledge Fair 2024¹, 9th Annual Forum of the EUSAIR², and the discussion in the Network of Interreg transnational programmes regarding support to EU macro-regional strategies. It summarises proposals for advancing collaboration and enhancing benefits for MRS/SBS and Interreg programmes post-2027.

What is working

- MRS are drivers for policy action, leveraging expertise from thematic groups to generate high-quality project ideas and address shared challenges through informed investment or policy changes.

¹ <https://interact.eu/library/247>

² [Stakeholder-consultation Shaping-Cohesion-Post-2027.pdf \(adriatic-ionian.eu\)](#)

- Interreg funding aligns with MRS/SBS frameworks, supporting MRS/SBS relevant projects that address key territorial challenges, facilitating cooperation, networking, knowledge exchange and practical solutions.
- MRS/SBS frameworks broaden Interreg's reach by engaging regional bodies, private stakeholders, and EU funds, enhancing the impact of Interreg and regional cooperation.
- MRS/SBS contribute to programme work by highlighting strategic topics and providing directions during project planning, implementation, and evaluation phases.
- Interreg's openness to diverse ideas, cultures, and stakeholders has fostered inclusivity and encouraged participation from a wide range of beneficiaries, contributing to cooperation and a more comprehensive approach to addressing territorial challenges.
- Interreg practically supports EU enlargement by involving IPA countries and enhancing cooperation with non-member states also in MRS contexts.
- Interreg capitalisation efforts ensure the replication of successful projects across regions, contributing to long-term regional development.

In addition, four transnational Interreg programmes supporting MRS:

- Provide crucial funding for MRS governance, capacity building, and strategic dialogue, reinforcing MRS implementation.
- Contribute to regional strategic thinking by facilitating collaboration and governance through project funding, stakeholder dialogues, studies, and thematic events. The programmes actively engage MRS thematic coordinators and stakeholders, sharing and discussing insights into significant developments, fostering project development, and strengthening governance structures. They can serve as platforms for knowledge exchange and intensifying networks.
- Support the objectives of MRS thematic fields by funding projects that address regional challenges, piloting solutions, stimulating new or complementary activities, providing platforms for capitalisation and collaboration, and increasing capacity for enlargement.

What are the potential improvements?

- Visibility and recognition of Interreg's contribution to MRS/SBS.
- Strengthening communication channels between Interreg programmes and MRS/SBS to ensure smooth information flow and better collaboration, especially with Interreg programmes other than transnational Interreg programmes overlapping the territories with MRS.
- MRS/SBS would need to improve their recognition as the joint strategic framework for the united territory.
- MRS could further enhance collaboration with various funding programmes and structures to strengthen synergies and facilitate better use of project outcomes across funding streams.
- There is great potential for further exploitation of outputs provided by all Interreg programmes. Capitalisation platforms, networks, and project results generated by Interreg are not effectively utilised by MRS/SBS.
- MRS/SBS's governance capacity should be improved to fully exploit their potential in fostering synergies and supporting networking among projects aligned with their thematic priorities.
- Strengthen collaboration with MRS stakeholders to enhance the long-term impact and policy integration of Interreg project outcomes. This would ensure that project results are sustained, adopted at policy levels, and remain beyond the project lifecycle.

- More engagement from the EU Directorates-General (DG Near, DG Mare) is needed to reinforce connections and enhance the visibility of shared objectives.

Furthermore, more synergies could be exploited if transnational Interreg programmes would continue and intensify efforts to:

- Exploring alternative approaches for triggering innovative projects that serve the objectives of the MRS, e.g. by creating new types of events or platforms.
- Continuously looking into options for enhancing collaboration with MRS throughout the programme implementation phase while ensuring compliance with provisions for Interreg-funds.
- Piloting initiatives to facilitate coordination of programmes and MRS with selected Interreg or mainstream programmes sharing the same geographical area to test and mutually learn.
- Creating evidence by taking measures to capture the impact of these measures through programme evaluations.

Key messages – call to action

Strengthen MRS/SBS's role in shaping joint long-term visions for territorial development and securing political ownership. This can serve as a valuable orientation for drafting the next Interreg programmes. Clear and transparent work programmes in thematic fields derived from macro-regional or sea basin vision could then be used by programmes to shape their future calls for proposals and align projects with strategic priorities.

Clarify the strategic value of MRS/SBS for Interreg. This includes clarifying how MRS/SBS work with Interreg programmes, the specific benefits of engaging with MRS/SBS, and the role of MRS/SBS coordinators in ensuring that project outcomes contribute to policy-level discussions.

Evolve MRS/SBS into active governance bodies that promote thematic collaboration and engage partners to drive synergies across regions. By establishing stronger links between Interreg and other EU programmes/funds and their projects, MRS/SBS can help ensure the durability, efficiency, consolidation, and ownership of project results, leading to more significant long-term investments and regional development outcomes.

Increase the visibility of Interreg's contributions to MRS/SBS to reinforce Interreg's value within the broader EU policy framework and create stronger recognition for its role in regional development.

Strengthen connections between Interreg and SBS, promoting more cohesive collaboration. Enhanced cooperation would align territorial projects with strategic maritime goals, creating synergies that can be effectively leveraged across regions.

Maintain current legal provisions supporting MRS/SBS through IPA, NDICI, and other funds while enhancing follow-up mechanisms for programme evaluations.

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