

Simplification and harmonization needs for 2021-2027

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

Overview

More than 60 Interreg colleagues, representing almost 40 programmes expressed their interest to discuss and exchange on simplification and harmonization needs for the current programming period. The main objective of the session was to collect and prioritize those needs and also to verify willingness of programmes to work further on the subject.

Methodology

The session was divided into three main parts, each one with a specific objective:

1. building common understanding what it means simplification and harmonisation;
2. what are the most challenging aspects, that makes Interreg and its programmes complicated/difficult;
3. which of these aspect might have the biggest impact if simplified or harmonized;

Key discussion points

1. Simplification vs. harmonization

Simplification:

- the process of making something less complicated and therefore easier to do or understand.

Harmonization:

- the act of making systems or laws the same or similar in different companies, countries, programmes, etc. so that they can work together more easily.

Simplification is not the same as harmonization!

Harmonized things doesn't have to simple and simple things can differ, thus not being harmonised.

2. The most challenging aspects of Interreg and its programmes and first ideas of potential solutions

Item	Issues detected	Potential solutions/ideas to be further investigated
1. Administrative burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy control to both financial and content aspects; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement a "real" risk based management (not that in the end 90-100% is still verified);
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different IT systems; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One common IT system for all programmes set in the regulation (no opt-out);
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for some documents to be submitted several times; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less of obligatory declarations, annexes, appendices to the application; • use of e-documents; • once the document submitted, can be used to different projects;
2. Overall programme implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlapping periods implemented at the same time; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one problem at one time;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow administration of programmes and projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simplified requirements; • less topics available at the same time; • on-going calls; • avoid micromanagement; • to keep the balance between a detail and the big picture; • speed vs. complexity;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complicated communication; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interreg for "dummies" – a comprehensive guidance; • continuous exchange; • use of different channels; • capitalization;
3. Rules (different interpretation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National (programme specific) rules in too many issues; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one single reporting system for all Interreg programmes; • reducing programme own specifics (in terms of rules); •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal uncertainty; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stability of framework; • exempt Interreg from rules that are not reflect reality (State aid, DNSH principles, beneficial owners, etc.) • early adoption of the regulations; • clear guidance at the programme start;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU regulation interpreted slightly differently in various MS; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MC members and Programmes more involved in drafting of the regulations (also in negotiations); • continuous dialogue with MS;
4. Capacities of beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of beneficiaries who can cooperate internationally; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simplified procedures, limited set of objectives;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forcing the same rules on everyone; • keep it short and simple, use of simple language (plain); • include them in the programme strategy; • awareness rising activities; • join tool for partner search; • offer pre-financing;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust and mutual understanding between partners; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear communication; • establishing or reinforcing local contact points; • clear task division and responsibilities;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited management capacities of local actors; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trainings for newcomers; • hiring experts to support them; • matching experienced with newcomers; • shorter application process;
5. Financial capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long times between expenditure and reimbursement; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance based projects; • use some of the procedures from direct management; • separate reports from each partner; • simplify management verification; • controllers check procurement procedures in advance;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of prepayments; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a system where e.g. 75% is paid automatically when the claim is submitted and the rest after the control.

Conclusions, plans for followed up

The meeting gave an overview of different aspects and interests of the programmes in terms of simplification and harmonization need and potentials.

All the discussed ideas will be considered for the preparation of further work in smaller workgroups.

Indicative interest of the programmes to further work on the issue

Item	Programme name
1. Administrative burden (18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein (ABH) • Baltic Sea Region • Bavaria - Czechia • Black Sea Basin • Brandenburg – Poland • Estonia – Latvia • France - Belgium • Germany - Denmark

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lithuania - Poland • Meuse – Rhine • Next MED • North Sea • North West Europe • Peace Plus • Poland – Saxony • Romania – Serbia • Slovakia – Austria • Urbact
<p>2. Overall programme implementation (21)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein (ABH) • Alpine Space • Baltic Sea Region • Bavaria - Czechia • Belgium – Netherlands • Brandenburg – Poland • Bulgaria – Turkey • Central Baltic • Danube Region • Espon • Estonia – Latvia • Euro-MED • Greater Region • Interreg Europe • North Sea • Northern Periphery and Arctic • North West Europe • Peace Plus • Poland – Saxony • Romania - Ukraine • Slovakia – Austria
<p>3. Rules (different interpretation) (28)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein (ABH) • Alpine Space • Baltic Sea Region • Bavaria - Czechia • Belgium – Netherlands • Brandenburg – Poland • Bulgaria – Turkey • Central Baltic • Central Europe • Czechia – Poland • Espon • Euro-MED • Greater Region • Interreg Europe • Latvia – Lithuania • MAC (Madeira – Azores – Canneries) • Meuse – Rhine • Next MED • North Sea • Northern Periphery and Arctic • Peace Plus • Poland – Saxony • Romania – Hungary • Romania – Serbia

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slovakia – Austria • Slovakia – Czechia • South Baltic • Urbact
4. Capacities of beneficiaries (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein (ABH) • Baltic Sea Region • Belgium – Netherlands • Estonia – Latvia • Italy - Croatia • Italy – Switzerland • Peace Plus • Slovakia – Czechia • South Baltic
5. Interreg in a bigger picture (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baltic Sea Region • Czechia – Poland • Estonia – Latvia • Greece – Northern Macedonia • Interreg Europe • Italy - Croatia • Poland – Saxony • Poland - Ukraine • South Baltic
6. Indicators (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein (ABH) • Baltic Sea Region • Estonia – Latvia • Italy - Croatia • Italy – Switzerland • North Sea

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