

# Post 2027 Discussion Paper

## Future of ISO1

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)

## The Future of Interreg Specific Objective 1

### Overview

Good governance is crucial for addressing shared challenges in border regions, as well as across larger transnational areas. In that context, Interreg is working on important issues such as building trust among communities across borders, tackling legal and administrative obstacles to cooperation, preparing and implementing cross-border services, or building capacity for the implementation of EU macro-regions and sea basin strategies, as well as the European Directives through a new Interreg specific objective introduced in the 2021-2027 programming period: ISO1 focusing on better cooperation governance.

ISO1 has been adopted by a vast majority of Interreg programmes and should be used as a catalyst to make the cooperation in defined areas and programme strategies work better and more sustainably. Although ISO1 appears to be successful, challenges remain in its implementation. Some of the observations included in this discussion paper are based on ongoing projects and programmes' approaches and experiences. They can however give ideas about possible regulatory repairs and inspirational ideas for a better future.

### Methodology

This document includes reflections<sup>1</sup>, ideas and examples mainly collected through Interact events (e.g. Interreg Knowledge Fair 2023<sup>2</sup> and 2024<sup>3</sup>) as well as a survey launched on the future of ISO1 (Sept. – Oct. 2024). Additional information was extracted from a report drafted by ANCT (France) following a workshop, during which French programmes had the possibility to discuss their approaches regarding the selection and implementation of that Interreg specific objective. An online survey was also launched in September 2024 to collect further feedback.

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<sup>1</sup> Publication | [ISO 1: Better Cooperation Governance](#) (October 2020)

<sup>2</sup> IKF Materials | [Governance in Interreg](#) (May 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Interreg Knowledge Fair 2024 Day 2 | [Promoting cross-border services: Interreg specific objectives for Interreg specific solutions](#) (March 2024)

## What is working?

ISO1 offers sufficient coverage and supports the implementation of very relevant governance-related actions in all Interreg strands. **Building institutional capacity is key** as it allows local and regional authorities **to engage effectively in cooperation**. A wide range of activities and programme approaches (e.g. online learning platforms, training programmes for officials, peer reviews, thematic communities) serve the purpose. Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia has even selected ISO1 to tackle cross-border criminality. The [SAFE](#) project is working towards a safer climate within its border area by organising joint training of border police.

ISO1 covers **building up mutual trust**, by encouraging people-to-people actions, and supports bottom-up approaches. This is widely used in CBC programmes. For example, [EstLat programme's project Trust2Integrate](#) aims to foster mutual trust through people-to-people actions and enhance social inclusion for people with disabilities.

Enhancing institutional capacity also leads to the creation of **effective and sustainable institutional partnerships** that extend beyond individual projects, and sets a solid foundation for continued cooperation even after funding periods end. This is the case of [EHRIN](#) that aims at strengthening cooperation governance for hydrogen development. This project develops strategies in the setting of three concrete Hydrogen projects and in a transnational partnership.

ISO1 is a **successful tool to work on the removal of legal and administrative obstacles to cooperation**. In this context, Interreg Hungary-Slovakia has started a mapping project for identifying cross-border obstacles ([#ACCESS](#) project). POCTEFA has adopted an interesting approach with the launch of a [questionnaire](#) to programmes' stakeholders and citizens to identify obstacles to cross-border cooperation. POCTEFA foresees to open calls for proposals based on the results of this questionnaire and will propose two types of modules based on the level of experience of the actors to be involved: (i) one module to allow the identification of potential solutions for the less experienced ones; (ii) one module for the most experienced ones (i.e. Euroregions) where obstacles have already been identified and where joint problem-solving can start. The [Coordination Point Border Obstacles Flanders-Netherlands](#) is another interesting example.

ISO1 supports the development of **integrated cross-sectoral approaches that are not primarily thematically driven** as the Policy objectives in the ERDF regulation. The Plans Intégrés TERritoriaux (PITER+) launched by Interreg France Italy ALCOTRA and its [ALPIMED+](#) recently approved project, as well as the [Integrated Territorial Cooperation Plans \(PTIC\)](#) from Interreg France-Switzerland are excellent examples. ISO1 gives programmes the possibility to address governance and integrated territorial development approaches, without being bound to the strict implementation requirements of PO5 in the 2021-2027 programming period.

ISO1 has a **multiplier effect** as it creates a favourable environment for implementing other Interreg objectives. Indeed, an action undertaken under ISO1 can set the ground for other initiatives to be implemented under other POs.

ISO1 supports the development of **innovative approaches and participatory processes**: the [GEtCoheSive](#) project funded by Interreg Central Europe develops and tests inclusive governance practices to improve public authorities' capacities to engage with citizens from vulnerable backgrounds, especially in view of environmental policies and access to care services.

ISO1 is a **very flexible policy tool** which **can also address the unexpected needs of any Interreg programme** through "Other actions to support better cooperation governance". It is for instance very relevant for OMR programmes (e.g. Indian Ocean and Caribbean) which need to find efficient ways to cooperate with third countries and combine ERDF/NDICI funding.

Transnational programmes **widely use ISO1 for capitalisation and embedding of results, as well as to support existing MRS and SBS**. [Interreg Baltic Sea Region](#) has set up project platforms to help EU-funded projects connect their results and make them available for policy makers and professionals across different sectors, but also looks at ways to better coordinate and communicate the

implementation of EUSBSR. [Interreg Euro-MED](#) is structured around four missions, and supports one Thematic Community project to embed project results and develop strategies to support their effective transfer, and one Institutional Dialogue project for each of the four missions and for the whole duration of the programming period. Interreg NPA has launched a [Call for clustering projects \(interreg-npa.eu\)](#) together with Interreg Aurora to facilitate synergies and clustering among Arctic and near-Arctic stakeholders.

ISO1 is **perfectly adapted to the Interreg Europe programme** which is **fully dedicated to capacity building**. It also allows the programme to cover all topics of the Cohesion policy. The possibility to select one single priority also contributes to greatly simplifying the programme's implementation (e.g. one single priority means also one single budget allocated to operations).

### What is missing and/or needs further improvements?

A **more detailed formulation in the regulation and a better definition** of governance and objectives with possible actions/sub-objectives would allow the Interreg programmes to opt more easily for one approach or another. Governance can be addressed through ISO1, PO5, or other POs even.

ISO1 seems to be **not yet used to its full potential**. This might be partly due to the fact that there is no sufficient knowledge yet among Interreg programmes on the different ways this objective is implemented and the possibilities it offers. This lack of knowledge can also explain the difficulty in engaging potential beneficiaries. Since capacity building is something that Interreg programmes do through regular projects, strong guidance and additional events need to be provided on ISO1 to get applicants on board. Interact should support the exchange of experiences, approaches and practices to better implement ISO1 (e.g. calls for proposals).

**Use existing structures to collect information and boost project generation.** Running project generation only as a bottom-up process based on open calls might not bring the right projects to address key topics or to bridge important gaps. Solid initiatives, structures and tools are available to understand the situation on the ground and to design new projects and possible solutions (e.g. b-solutions). Euroregions, EGTCs and other cross-border structures can also consult their citizens on the services they find to be lacking or those that could be improved in their region.

It is hard to **measure, quantify and demonstrate the real impact of governance-related improvements**. The approaches and expected results also seem heterogeneous. There should be better indicators (e.g. for capacity building) to make it easier to aggregate the data.

Certain initiatives setting up cooperation frameworks do not necessarily **make links with the Interreg programme** located in the concerned area. As an example, the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) was created in 2023 to reinforce cooperation in maritime spatial planning among nine countries from the North Sea, with limited coordination with Interreg North Sea.

**Showcase success stories and tangible benefits of cooperation.** Targeted communication strategies are needed to increase public awareness in cross-border governance initiatives, and to engage citizens and relevant stakeholders. There are ways in which Interreg brings real added value that need to be further promoted (e.g. trust building between regions, new networks, increased connections between regions).

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

ISO1 can be considered **a successful tool** given the fact that a vast majority of Interreg programmes selected it, and in the way it is being implemented, with significant impact through its leverage effect. In addition, ISO1 is clearly **relevant for all Interreg strands**.

**Strengthening bottom-up governance approaches** through ISO1 allows local communities and stakeholders to take the lead in addressing shared challenges, promoting solutions that are tailored to regional needs while aligning with EU priorities. **Local knowledge is key** to overcoming administrative

and legal barriers across borders. However, ISO1 needs further development to be relevant for all strands, keeping also a possibility to set up bottom-up approaches and linked operations of strategic importance. Transnational programmes could see **ISO1 as a sole priority**, provided it is further developed also allowing piloting and testing new solutions in certain thematic fields, incl., possibility for investments where needed.

ISO1 should be given **more strategic weight and visibility**, e.g. by elevating it to the level of a Policy objective in the future ERDF regulation in order to better recognise and reflect its importance for future Interreg programmes and of Interreg as such within the whole EU cohesion policy. ISO1 combines all unique selling points of Interreg such as improved cooperation, better governance, territoriality and cross-sectoral/integrated approaches, as well as long-term solutions by supporting and building lasting networks and cooperation. To further anchor it in Interreg programmes, it could possibly even become mandatory for Interreg programmes to select ISO1 as a governance priority. It could form an umbrella to all programme specific objectives, that would in turn further define the different thematic fields of the governance related objectives to be achieved.

ISO1 has played an **important role in the development and improvement of CPS**<sup>4</sup> (Cross-border Public Services). Through capacity-building and trust-building initiatives, ISO1 ensures that public authorities and regional stakeholders are equipped to work together, implement joint services, and respond effectively to crises in a more resilient way, thus helping to implement needed reforms. This is where Interreg can make an important contribution. Future Interreg programmes should therefore be designed with a strategic view on how CPS could be established in the long-run with short- and medium-term actions to be implemented in an Interreg project.

Many Interreg programmes wish to **reach out to new beneficiaries** for whom cooperation is not well known but may be beneficial. This may require targeted search and communication with the relevant institutions. Benefits and added value of Interreg projects carried out under ISO1 shall be shared and widely promoted.

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<sup>4</sup> [CPS - Cross-border Public Services | ESPON](#)

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**Lead Author** Kelly Zielniewski

**Contributing authors:** Ilze Ciganska, Tomasz Petrykowski, Marko Roukangas

**Interact**



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