

## Post 2027 | Consultation Report

### 2b. MRS and SBS

14 January 2025

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

This subject specific report is an annex to the Synergies and cooperation subject report (Improving synergies among Interreg and other funds and policies), and is part of Interact's [Post 2027 Consultation reports](#)

#### Overview

EU Macro-regional Strategies (MRS) and Sea Basin Strategies (SBS) are vital territorial strategies that offer a shared policy framework and guidance for investments and cooperation for a united territory. EU regulations (ETC, ESF+, Just Transition, ERDF, IPA, NDICI) recognise and stipulate Interreg programmes to contribute to the objectives of these strategies.

Recent years have shown the complementarity between strategies and Interreg, especially the four transnational Interreg programmes, which are programmed along the MRS objectives aiming to foster 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.

#### Methodology

This document builds on feedback collected from Interreg programmes during 2024, including the Interreg Knowledge Fair 2024<sup>1</sup>, the 9th Annual Forum of the EUSAIR<sup>2</sup>, and the discussion in the Network of Transnational Interreg programmes regarding support to MRS<sup>3</sup>. It summarises proposals for advancing collaboration and enhancing benefits for MRS/SBS and Interreg programmes post-2027.

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<sup>1</sup> Interact | Interreg Knowledge Fair 2024 Day 1 | Macro-regional and Sea basin strategies: Frameworks to explore and benefit from (interact-eu.net)

<sup>2</sup> Stakeholder-consultation\_Shaping-Cohesion-Post-2027.pdf (adriatic-ionian.eu)

<sup>3</sup> [Interact | Working Paper: TN Interreg Programmes and MRS - Together unlocking benefits for regions and citizens](#)

## What is working

- MRS/SBS are drivers for policy action, leveraging expertise from thematic groups to support the generation of strategic and high-quality project ideas and address shared challenges through investment or policy changes based on evidence and expertise, bringing added value for Interreg.
- Interreg objectives align with MRS/SBS, supporting projects that address key territorial challenges. These projects facilitate cooperation, networking, and knowledge exchange and deliver practical solutions, contributing to the priorities of both Interreg programmes and MRS/SBS.
- MRS/SBS broaden the Interreg projects' reach by engaging regional, national and pan-regional stakeholders, private partners, and EU funds, enhancing the impact of Interreg and uptake of project results into practice.
- MRS/SBS contribute to programme work by highlighting strategic topics that call for cooperation, providing inputs for programme and later also project preparation, 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 enhancing cooperation with non-member states in MRS contexts.
- Interreg capitalisation efforts ensure the transfer of consolidated knowledge from projects to regions and the integration of project results into policy and governance structures, 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 by stimulating piloting solutions and new or complementary activities, providing platforms for capitalisation and collaboration, and increasing capacity for enlargement.

## What is missing and needs improving

- The contribution of Interreg programmes to MRS/SBS merits more recognition and visibility through diverse communication measures.
- Strengthening communication channels and information flow between all Interreg programmes, whether fully or partly overlapping with the territories of MRS/SBS. MRS/SBS would benefit from ensuring closer collaboration also with Interreg programmes other than transnational Interreg programmes sharing the territories with MRS/SBS.
- MRS/SBS would need to improve their recognition and understanding as the strategic framework for the united territory and could do this by providing ambitious visions for the long-term development of the territory and clear and measurable objectives.
- MRS could further enhance Interreg programme collaboration with 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 results provided by all Interreg programmes. MRS/SBS could better utilise capitalisation platforms, networks, and project results generated by Interreg.
- 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.
- Strengthening collaboration between Interreg project partners and MRS/SBS stakeholders could enhance Interreg project outcomes' long-term impact and integration into national, regional, and local policies. This would ensure that project results are sustained, adopted at policy levels, and remain beyond the project lifecycle.
- Stronger and regular collaboration with relevant EU Directorates-General (such as DG Near, DG Mare, and others) is essential to reinforce connections and enhance the visibility of shared MRS/SBS and Interreg objectives. Besides, there is a potential for further exploitation of MRS and respectively Interreg as frameworks to further support the integration of candidate countries into the EU.

Furthermore, more synergies could be exploited if transnational Interreg programmes, especially the ones overlapping with the territories of MRS/SBS, would continue and intensify efforts to:

- Explore alternative approaches for triggering innovative and qualitative projects that serve the objectives of the MRS/SBS, e.g. by creating new types of events or platforms.
- Continuously consider options for enhancing collaboration with MRS/SBS throughout the programme implementation cycle while ensuring compliance with provisions for Interreg-funds.

- Pilot initiatives to facilitate coordination between MRS/SBS and selected Interreg or mainstream programmes sharing the same geographical area to test and mutually learn.
- Create evidence of Interreg's contribution to territorial development and its impact within the MRS/SBS frameworks, using programme and MRS/SBS evaluations.

### What would be your vision for the future

Strengthen MRS/SBS's role in shaping joint long-term visions for territorial development and securing political ownership. This can serve as valuable input and orientation for drafting the next Interreg programmes. Clear and transparent Action Plans or thematic area work programmes 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 and territorial priorities.

Enhance the strategic value of MRS/SBS for Interreg programmes throughout the programme lifecycle. This includes clarifying how MRS/SBS work with Interreg programmes, the specific benefits of engaging with MRS/SBS stakeholders and the role of MRS/SBS coordinators in ensuring that relevant projects of high quality (along the programme's rules) are developed, and project outcomes contribute to policy-level discussions.

Strengthen the capacities of MRS/SBS to promote thematic collaboration and engage various partners to drive synergies across regions. By establishing stronger links between Interreg and other EU programmes/funds and their projects, MRS/SBS can help to ensure the durability, efficiency, consolidation, and ownership of project results, leading to long-term territorial impact.

Increase the visibility and recognition 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 territorial development.

Strengthen connections between Interreg and SBS to foster more cohesive collaboration. This enhanced cooperation would better align territorial projects with shared strategic maritime goals, creating synergies that can be effectively leveraged across regions.

Maintain current legal provisions supporting MRS/SBS through ERDF, IPA, NDICI, and other funds.

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