

Soft skills in Interreg

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | November 2025

Overview

Successful cross-border cooperation relies on knowledge and people. Interreg professionals are skilful managers, and strong soft skills contribute to their success. Soft skills are the personal traits and behaviours that help people to work well together. Soft skills are not “optional extras.” They are the foundation of effective cooperation.

Soft skills are key abilities that support teamwork, boost cultural awareness, enhance leadership and ensure clear communication. They build trust and help us navigate complex, multicultural contexts.

The session aimed to reflect on the human side of cooperation. Participants explored essential soft skills for successful cooperation and identified which ones we need to master for success in Interreg.

Methodology

The session followed an interactive methodology grounded in experiential learning. After brief introductions, participants joined an icebreaker. This exercise highlighted soft skills, showing how assumptions can block clear communication.

Next, participants joined a mapping activity. In group discussions, participants pointed out challenges in their daily Interreg work. They described the ideal situation after resolving these issues. Lastly, they listed the soft skills needed to close the gap. Small group discussions helped participants reflect on real situations.

Key discussion points and reflections

In their discussions, participants identified the **challenges** related to:

- **Human Resources: tasks, roles and processes**

Participants mentioned challenges such as unclear roles, overlapping responsibilities, and team coordination. Miscommunication, cultural and language differences, and uneven task distribution. Complex or inconsistent procedures further contribute to misunderstandings and reduced efficiency.

- **Workload and time management**

Participants noted unbalanced workloads, often tight deadlines, and competing priorities as recurring pressures. Parallel tasks and last-minute demands can cause stress. They raise the risk of burnout and lower the ability to plan effectively.

- **Team dynamics and collaboration**

Challenges arise from different viewpoints, varying commitment levels, and difficulties in finding common ground. Motivation problems, unease with feedback, and gaps in communication can disrupt teamwork.

- **Meetings and communication**

Participants noted that unstructured meetings, unclear goals, and inconsistent communication cause frustration. Bad presentations and unclear messages lead to misunderstandings and waste time.

- **Interreg-specific challenges**

In addition to the above, participants highlighted challenges specific to the Interreg working environment, such as communicating clear and consistent messages to project beneficiaries and ensuring they understand programme rules. A lack of coordination and communication between programme bodies. Cultural and language barriers, among other things.

When asked to imagine an **ideal situation**, participants described it as:

- **Clarity, structure and understanding**

Participants envisioned a space where roles, responsibilities and information are shared clearly and consistently. Processes are clear. Rules are simple, and shared understanding guide daily work. Clear messaging supports smoother cooperation across teams and cultures.

- **Effective teamwork**

The ideal situation reflects balanced teams that work in a supportive, respectful atmosphere. Mutual trust, open dialogue and constructive disagreement enable collaboration. Workloads are shared fairly, emotional balance is kept, so team members feel valued and engaged.

- **High-quality processes**

Well-organised and predictable processes were highlighted as essential. Participants described regular coordination meetings, purposeful communication, and well-designed events as key elements. Clear procedures and shared understanding of roles ensure smoother workflows and fewer misunderstandings.

- **Empowerment and autonomy**

Participants highlighted the importance of autonomy and doing tasks with confidence. With support and resources, plus trust from colleagues and managers, one can take initiative and perform well.

- **Strategic vision**

An ideal situation happens when teams share a clear understanding of the programme's broader purpose and direction. A shared vision helps align activities, supports decision-making, and connects daily tasks and long-term objectives.

Lastly, participants noted the **soft skills** needed to address the challenges and to reach the ideal situation. The following skills were mentioned:

- **Skills related to communication** (*clear, simple and respectful communication, active listening, use of plain language, representation skills*). Participants noted skills that help to convey messages clearly and understand them, reducing misinterpretation.
- **Interpersonal and relationship skills** (*focus on relationships, tolerance, empathy, being authentic, mindfulness, feedback, cooperation*). Participants emphasised skills that foster positive and constructive working relationships, support teamwork and strengthen interaction.
- **Conflict management and negotiation skills** (*conflict resolution, persuasion, compromising, negotiation, crisis management, anticipating problems*). Skills related to anticipating and navigating disagreements were mentioned. These are important abilities for managing difficult situations and reaching mutual understanding.
- **Leadership and team-oriented skills** (*people management, team building, managing complexity, visioning, diplomacy*). Participants highlighted the need for leadership skills. These skills help teams work well and provide clear direction.
- **Organisational and planning skills** (*organisational skills, planning, time management, prioritising, following the plan, managing tasks and roles*). Many inputs reflected the need for strong organisational abilities. Participants mentioned the importance of planning and prioritising, managing time and tasks, anticipating issues, and structuring work effectively. These skills support the organisation of daily activities.
- **Personal qualities** (*persistence, letting go of non-serious or unimportant matters*). Participants also saw the worth of personal traits like perseverance. They valued the skill to tell essential issues from non-essential ones.

Conclusions and plans for 2026

The session concluded with a joint reflection. Participants shared their thoughts from the mapping exercise.

Interact shared current and upcoming events, training opportunities, and activities aimed to strengthen soft skills in the Interreg community. The insights from the session will help shape future events and activities.

Session leader: Baiba Liepa

Delivery team: Satu Hietanen, Nebojsa Nikolic, Jon Bergthorsson

Report drafted by: Baiba Liepa