

Programme design 2028–2034

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | November 2025

Overview

The session was designed to provide Interreg programmes an opportunity to consider implications of the new legal framework for the upcoming programmes' design. Its objectives were twofold:

- To present the key building blocks of the **intervention logic** according to the new legal framework and provide space for initial exchanges, identifying open questions and challenges;
- To share experiences from the current **programming process**, reflecting on what worked well, what has changed under the new legal framework, and what remains unclear – particularly regarding the timing, organisation, and planning programming for the upcoming period.

As the legislation is still under negotiation, the discussions during the session should be considered informal preparatory exchanges. Some elements may change as the legal framework develops.

Methodology

The session began with a short introduction, including reflections on the current state of play, followed by a presentation from **Simona Pohlová (DG REGIO)**, who set the scene and provided key updates.

After the introduction, participants joined **two parallel working groups**, each lasting 50 minutes and focusing on different aspects of programme design:

- **Intervention logic:** presentation of the main building blocks under the new legislative framework, followed by exchanges on their interpretation and application.
- **Programming process:** discussion on what has changed or remained the same, key points of attention, and practical aspects such as timing, organisation, and sequencing of the programming process.

All participants had the opportunity to attend and contribute to each discussion.

The following section of this report provides a summary of the key messages presented by DG REGIO and the main points discussed in each thematic session.

Key discussion points

Setting the scene (DG Regio)

Programmes are encouraged to **start planning programming committees and processes without delay – already in 2026 – even though many uncertainties remain.**

Programming should **begin by asking key questions** such as:

- What are the pressing needs of my programme area and the people who live there – needs that can be addressed through cooperation and have the potential to bring positive change?
- What are the main obstacles to cooperation?
- Who are the key transnational and cross-border actors that need to be involved in the programming process?
- What are the main lessons learned from the current period that should be taken into account?
- Do we intend to use territorial instruments?
- Do we plan to implement small project funds?
- How can I ensure access for new beneficiaries and specific target groups – for example, young people or NGOs?

Programmes are also invited to **reflect on the partnership principle**, considering not only how partners are involved in programming but also how they can be engaged throughout programme implementation.

Regarding **territorial analysis**, it is expected that programmes make use of the **border or transnational profiles** currently being developed by **ESPON** for all transnational and internal cross border programmes (planned **March–April 2026**). This data is valuable as it reflects the specific nature of cooperation, though other data sources may also be used.

For the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** and **Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)** principle, details are still being clarified, but it is advisable to plan for these requirements in the process.

The **performance-based approach** provides an opportunity for programmes to focus on the specific changes they wish to achieve during the implementation.

Cooperation should be seen not only as a **tool for delivering change** but also as an **objective in itself – improving governance and cooperation capacity**. Programmes are encouraged to make use of **people-to-people projects and CLLD** wherever it makes sense, as these can foster stronger community ties and build trust across borders.

Process: what, when and who

In the session the following key considerations concerning the programming process were discussed:

WHAT – Content and structure of the Interreg Chapter

It is envisaged that preparation of future programmes would require a similar level of work as in the previous period. From the European Commission's side, the emphasis is placed on substantive, data-based in-depth analysis for diagnosing the needs, potential and deficits of the programme area.

Interreg Chapter

- Each **Interreg programme** to be included as a Chapter in the Interreg Plan following the **template** set out in Annex to draft ERDF regulation.
- Shall include all **essential information**, yet within a limited space.
- Remains **clear and readable** for the EC (especially regarding objectives and expected results).
- The EC reserves the right to **request clarifications**, but internal analyses are not required to be attached as formal annexes. However, this does **not mean they should not exist** – on the contrary, **data-based analytical work** at programme level is strongly recommended.
- The biggest challenge is how to write the chapter so that it highlights what matters most for the EC's assessment?

Data-based needs analysis

- **Border or transnational profile** to be provided by the EC for internal cross border and transnational Interreg programmes (based on ESPON data and expert analysis).
- The EC can envisage that, the **border profile** may largely replace the **need** for a separate **territorial analysis**. The data collected for transnational cooperation areas is meant to lay the groundwork for the actual territorial analysis to be carried out by the individual programmes themselves.
- As for the **programme territory** – the EC reiterates its support for continuity wherever effective and justified (which applies to most programmes). Therefore, it is recommended to build on the current framework (as it is the case for the ESPON profiles).
- **Data limitations**: ESPON relies primarily on data available at the European level (Eurostat, geographical portals, etc.), which often operate at higher NUTS categories (mainly NUTS 3), while programme territories are frequently defined at lower levels (NUTS 4 or local). This may lead to data distortions, particularly if large urban centres (beyond the preferred territory) are included in the Border Profile, as they can significantly influence macro-economic and social indicators and shift the perceived development poles and innovation potential.

SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment)

- The Directive which underlays the requirement for SEA remains in place. The EC will clarify how it should be translated for future Interreg programmes. Currently the programme is regarded by legislation as a public policy document that must undergo environmental assessment – even if it supports mostly soft activities.

State aid

- How to handle state aid conditions, given the current uncertainty about the impact of the PBA model on programmes and on the reporting of real costs vs PBA?
- An update of the GBER (General Block Exemption Regulation) is currently ongoing. It is expected that a new version to be available before the programme approvals, thus there will be room for adaptation of programme measures according to the new legislation.

WHEN – Programming timeline

- The EC is cooperating with ESPON to prepare a new generation of Cooperation Orientation Papers (COP). The COP will be evidence based and will rely on the on **profiles** currently prepared by ESPON for internal cross border and transnational programmes.
- Programmes can follow the process of finalisation of the *profiles* (and comment, if relevant) through their MS representatives in ESPON MC and relative Steering Group members. For COREIB – cross-border cooperation profiles – the information is here: [COREIB\] - Collecting and analysing data for the post-27 INTERREG | ESPON](#)
- Information on TNCOOP research: [TNCOOP\] - Interreg Transnational Programmes: needs and opportunities for the future cooperation | ESPON](#)
- Programmes should establish their programming task force in 2026, to start programming discussions in the partnership and with the EC.
- The **tight programming schedule**, including:
 - **6 months** for programme submission,
 - **4 months** for EC approval,
 - followed by the **N+10 months** rule for the start of cash flow.

This raises discussion between EC and Member States on possible adjustments to these compressed deadlines, as Interreg programmes are inherently more complex than national ones – requiring more time for cross border consultations, programme design and project generation.

WHO – Gravity for responsibilities

Leadership and governance

- Clarify who leads – Managing Authority, National Authority or Task Force.
- Leadership should be clear already at the start, as it determines decision-making capacity and speed of work.

Task Force composition

- Should reflect Monitoring Committee principles but be operational and small enough to work effectively.
- To identify who must be involved from the very beginning (Managing Authority, National Contact Points, key beneficiaries, partners from regions, NGO, etc.).

Internal vs. external work

- How much of the preparation work could be externalized, drafting the key documents, analysis, etc.
- How much time would it require (procurements, etc.)?

Partnership principle (partner engagement)

- Involving partners without delays is key – early consultations can speed up later approvals and help build shared ownership.

Intervention logic

In the session the following key building blocks and concepts of the draft regulation were presented and discussed:

Building block	Key points
Intervention strategy	• High-level plan: what the programme aims to achieve and how. • Based on analysis of territorial needs, challenges and gaps and the strategic choices of programmes.
Measures	• Defined in NRP (Article 4(10) and Performance Reg (Article 2(3)). • Is a reform or investment, or both. • No fixed number of measures required by regulation. • Building blocks of the intervention strategy. • Linked to general and specific objectives, indicators, costs, and milestones/targets. • Each measure shall be assigned at least one intervention field from Annex I in Performance Reg Article 14(2) • Interreg Plan requirement ERDF (Article 8(3)(c): Provide a list and description of measures, their objectives, milestones, targets, and indicative completion dates.

	- For the purpose of the Interreg Plan chapter and in particular table 1(b) only the specific objective (including Interreg specific objective) to which the measure primarily contributes should be indicated. - It's possible for more than one measure to be allocated to the same specific objective
General Objective	- Current understanding: Interreg chapters should contribute to objectives set in draft Article 2(1)(a) NRPP reg (ERDF and Cohesion Fund) and/or 2(1)(c) (ESF) - A general objective may have one or more specific objectives.
Specific Objectives	More detailed and harmonised framework, offering greater flexibility than in 2021–2027. - Defined in: Article 3(a)(c) NRP and Article 7(4) ERDF. 16 specific objectives under the NRP + 3 Interreg-specific objectives under the ERDF: - Better cooperation governance - A safer and more secure Europe - More resilient regions bordering Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine No thematic concentration requirements. No limitation on the number of specific objectives a programme may select.
Intervention field	- A standardized EU categories used to classify supported activities (Annex I, Performance Reg). - Ensures consistency in budget tracking and performance monitoring. - Should be assigned 1 output indicator for final target/milestone and 1 or more corresponding result indicator(s).
Output indicators	Use harmonised EU indicators (Annex I, Performance Reg: intervention fields, output and corresponding result indicators). Definition: output indicator means a quantitative performance indicator that monitors what is directly produced or supported by the implementation of an activity (Article 2(8) Performance Reg). You must select one output indicator per intervention field. In duly justified cases and with the EC agreement, an output indicator not included in Annex I may be used. The output indicator selected defines the final <i>milestone or target</i> for the intervention field assigned to the measure.
Result indicators	Definition: result indicator is a quantitative performance indicator that monitors the direct effects of supported activities (Article 2(9) Performance Reg). - You must assign one or more result indicators corresponding to the intervention field of the measure as provided under Annex I, if available. (If "greenhouse gas emissions avoided" is assigned as the

	result indicator, a second result indicator from the same intervention field (if available) must also be assigned).
Targets and milestones	- Both are “stepping stones” on way to delivering measure. Definition milestone: qualitative achievement. Definition target: quantitative achievement. - Final target/milestone = output indicator.
Pay-out value	- Both milestones and targets can be assigned payout values. - This means: - Amount defined ex ante - Paid upon achievement of milestone/target.

Conclusions, plans for followed up

Following the publication of the draft regulatory package over the summer, programmes’ understanding of the key buildings blocks of the post-2027 intervention logic continues to evolve with each opportunity to exchange with the EC and between programmes.

While this process is still ongoing, what is clear is that **measures** are the central building block of the intervention logic and that they are to be programme specific.

Further work is required to consider what measures within an Interreg context could look like, as well as what the options and opportunities are regarding other elements of the intervention logic (namely, intervention fields, milestones and targets). Within Interact, this work will be led by the Indicators working group, working closely with the Performers working group.

A **webinar on the new intervention logic** which was held online on **12 November**, and the presentation is available [here](#).

Other upcoming online events include:

- **Indicators: now and for the Future** – week 6, 2026
- **PBA for Beginners** – week 7 and week 17, 2026
- **PBA and Indicators for the Future** – week 23, 2026

Finally, Interact would like to thank the active participation of participants, as well as the contribution of EC colleagues – both in preparation for the session and answering programmes questions on the day.

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