

Interreg Programme Management Handbook

Guide to the 2021-2027 period

The Interreg Programme Management Handbook comprises a series of factsheets. They can be read individually, or collectively, to understand the relevance of certain aspects of Interreg management. They cover the relevance, legal basis, key challenges and approaches to the given subject.

Factsheet | Synergies and Complementarities Across EU Funds

1. What is it? What is the definition of this work?

Synergies and complementarities across EU funds involve strategically coordinating different funding instruments to maximise impact, optimise resources, and ensure coherence in achieving EU priorities. The 2021-2027 programming period reinforces stronger links between EU programmes by encouraging collaboration across various funding instruments, including shared management funds like ERDF and ESF+ and direct management programmes like Horizon Europe, COSME and LIFE. Synergies are also highlighted within the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Just Transition Fund. In addition, this also extends to external cooperation, where synergies with IPA III and NDICI enable more coordinated investments, fostering cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation with neighbouring and enlargement countries.

Cooperation is increasingly integrated into the national and regional Investment for Jobs and Growth (IJG) programmes, aiming to facilitate the uptake of innovative solutions and fostering cross-sectoral and cooperation across borders. Similarly, the Interreg regulation highlights the importance of fostering synergies, both among its different strands and with other EU funds. Interreg programmes, with their extensive experience in cooperation, can serve as a bridge between territorial cooperation and IJG programmes, offering tested approaches and methodologies that enhance the effectiveness of synergies across EU funds.

2. Why are we discussing it?

Interreg remains the main funding tool for cooperation across borders, helping regions work together to find solutions to shared challenges. The inclusion of interregional cooperation elements in national and regional Investment for Jobs and Growth programmes helps to integrate cooperation into the wider EU funding landscape.

These efforts aim to enhance impact, avoid duplication, and ensure strategic resource use. For Interreg programmes, this shift presents opportunities to align more closely with regional and national funding programmes and EU direct management funds, such as Horizon Europe, to create a more coordinated and complementary approach to addressing common challenges. Cooperation and coordination are especially encouraged in the context of supporting EU macro-regional and sea-basin strategies.

3. What are the Legal references and basis for this topic?

The legal framework for fostering synergies and complementarities across EU funds during the 2021-2027 programming period is established in several key regulations:

- **Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) (EU) 2021/1060:**
 - Recital 49 stress the importance of synergies between funds and other instruments to increase fund efficiency (use of existing implementation mechanisms, combination of funding).
 - Recital 61 highlights the synergies between funds and direct investment instruments
 - Article 5(3) emphasises the importance of **coordination, complementarity, and coherence** between EU funds to ensure their effective implementation and avoid duplication
 - Article 11(1)(b) (2)(3) stipulate that the Partnership Agreement shall contain details on complementarities and synergies between the funds covered by the Agreements and other funds.
- **Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059**
 - Recital 23 highlights the importance of strengthening synergies and complementarities between the various strands of Interreg to maximize the impact of Union support.
 - Article 17 (3) (b) (ii) requests as part of the content of the programme a summary indicating joint investments and complementarities and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments
- **ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058:** In its Preamble highlights the need to work in complementarities and synergies with ESF+. Just Transition Fund, the EMFAF and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as with the EU4Health and other Union policies
- Synergies also mentioned in fund specific regulations, as well as regulations outlining direct management programmes, such as, for example, ESF+, Horizon Europe, LIFE,

In addition, CPR Article 22(3)(d) emphasises the need to consider and plan cooperation actions when designing and implementing specific objectives of regional and national programmes:

- Art. 22(3)(d)(vi) of the “Common Provisions Regulation” Article 22 (3) Each programme shall set out: [...]
 - (d) for each specific objective: [...]
 - (vi) the interregional, cross-border and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or outside the Union, where relevant

Synergies also mentioned in fund specific regulations, as well as regulations outlining direct management programmes, such as, for example, ESF+, Horizon Europe, LIFE.

To support cooperation in regional and national programmes, CPR Article 63(4) stresses that all or part of an operation may be implemented outside of a Member State, including outside the Union, provided that the operation contributes to the objectives of the programme.

4. What are the challenges, key considerations and frequently asked questions?

New

Fostering synergies and coordination across EU funds presents both opportunities and challenges. While the 2021-2027 programming period has introduced mechanisms to strengthen these links, practical and conceptual challenges remain. Below are some key considerations affecting work on synergies and complementarities in this funding period:

Clear definitions and strategic alignment

A lack of clarity around terms such as "synergies," "embedding," and "capitalisation" hinders effective implementation. Establishing harmonised definitions and promoting a shared understanding of these concepts among all stakeholders is critical. Furthermore, fostering synergies requires a more strategic approach to planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation across all programmes, not just Interreg. This strategic alignment ensures that synergies are practical, achievable, and valuable within the broader EU funding landscape.

Improved harmonisation and simplification of processes

Harmonisation and simplification of administrative and methodological processes are equally important to enable effective collaboration across EU funds. Aligning rules and procedures, particularly with the involvement of the European Commission's Directorates-General, would reduce administrative burdens and make it easier to implement synergies. Additionally, improved tools and platforms, such as Index.eu and keep.eu for Interreg, along with enhanced data collection and analysis methods, are needed to measure and demonstrate the impact of synergies in Interreg. In this sense and acknowledging the numerous existing funding platforms and with the aim of simplification the One-stop-shop principle can be optimal.

Visibility and recognition of Interreg among other EU funds

Interreg plays a key role in fostering cooperation across borders, yet its visibility in the broader EU funding landscape remains limited. While regulatory frameworks encourage synergies, cooperation with Interreg is not systematically integrated into IJG and direct management programmes. As a relatively small fund, Interreg cannot drive synergies alone while it can practically demonstrate how cooperation can enhance impact. A more structured approach across all relevant funding instruments would help move synergies beyond voluntary efforts, leading to efficient use of funds and more coordinated investments and interventions.

Knowledge, capacities, competences, and governance

Developing synergies across EU funds requires specialised knowledge, sufficient resources, and a collaborative governance framework. Managing authorities, joint secretariats of Interreg programmes, as well as monitoring committee members are in a unique position to promote the search for synergies with other funding sources, and to foster cooperation.

Monitoring committees, together with their administrative units, play a key role in guiding strategic decisions on synergies, facilitating exchanges of good practices, and ensuring that cooperation opportunities are effectively embedded in programme governance. Their involvement is crucial in shaping synergies at both programme and project levels.

Moreover, the work on synergies requires staff to have a clear understanding of complementarity opportunities, as well as broad knowledge of different funding instruments and their requirements. Project partners also need stronger support in creating and implementing synergies on the ground, including guidance in identifying complementary funding opportunities and forming partnerships.

This clearly indicates that developing and implementing synergies demands appropriate resource allocation, including technical assistance and dedicated time to build substantial complementarities. Increased capacity-building efforts, such as training on synergy creation, management, and evaluation, as well as mutual learning and dialogue initiatives, are important. A robust knowledge-sharing

framework across programmes further enhance staff expertise, enabling more effective identification, preparation, and implementation of linked projects or multi-fund projects.

Application of cooperation possibilities outside the programme area

In the 2021-2027 funding period, programmes have more flexibility to support projects outside their area, provided this clearly benefits the programme. CPR Article 63(4) allows all or part of an operation to take place outside a Member State, including outside the EU, if it helps achieve the programme's goals. This makes it easier for programmes to collaborate with partners in neighbouring countries or regions facing similar challenges.

While most cooperation happens within the programme area, this flexibility opens opportunities to build partnerships that go beyond borders. These opportunities are especially important for **supporting macro-regional and sea-basin strategies**.

Strategic alignment and the role of EU macro-regions and sea-basins

A lack of strategic alignment between EU programmes often leads to fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for cooperation. Macro-regional and sea-basin strategies (MRS and SBS) offer a valuable framework for bridging this gap. However, their potential to align priorities and foster synergies across programmes require an active dialogue between both programmes and strategies stakeholders.

5. How are the challenges addressed?

The effective implementation of synergies and complementarities across EU funds requires a structured approach, addressing key aspects such as governance, strategic alignment, practical tools, and capacity-building. The following practices have been applied by various programmes to benefit from cooperation with other programmes and funds:

Strategic planning and policy alignment

- Synergies are embedded in programme design and implementation from the start of the programme. This includes aligning Interreg strategies with broader EU funding mechanisms such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, ERDF, ESF+, RRF and the Just Transition Fund. Here not only the **programme monitoring committee members** play a role making sure programmes are complementary at the same time avoiding negative overlaps with the intervention made by other funds in their territory but also Commission when planning their funding tools and policies
- The stronger cooperation across Interreg strands to maximise the impact and efficiency of Interreg results in a respective geographical area.
- The inclusion of interregional, transnational, and cross-border cooperation elements in national and regional programmes was strongly encouraged opening more opportunities for cooperation.
- EU MRS and SBS offer an effective framework for aligning policy objectives and pooling resources at a macro-regional level.

Inter-programme mechanisms and platforms

- **Inter-programme dialogue** was strengthened in 2021-2027 programme context facilitating regular exchanges between managing authorities, joint secretariats, and other programme stakeholders facilitate knowledge-sharing, reduce duplication, and identify funding complementarities. These exchanges take place within multiple frameworks, including, for example, networks of managing authorities, programme-driven initiatives, country-based coordination efforts, geographical networks facilitated by Interact, as well as within MRS and SBS. Additionally, structured inter-programme cooperation mechanisms and platforms provide targeted support for thematic synergies across shared topics, such as sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean.

- Tools like the **Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform** support knowledge-sharing and best practice transfer among regions.
- **National-level exchanges for knowledge sharing:** Many countries facilitate structured exchanges between Interreg programmes to enhance coordination and learning. These meetings help programme bodies align strategies, share good practices, and address implementation challenges collectively. For example, in [Germany](#), the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development facilitates a dialogue and knowledge exchange among the six transnational Interreg programmes with German participation. This helps improve synergies and improve communication and knowledge transfer among German stakeholders.

Administrative and financial tools

- Many Interreg programmes have improved coordination by sharing administrative approaches and operational tools. For example, Interreg France-Wallonia, adopted best practices from Interreg Flanders-Netherlands, IPA Hungary-Serbia benefits from close cooperation with other programmes sharing the same managing authority. Interreg ALCOTRA (France-Italy) used the experience and practices from other French Interreg programmes for small-scale projects and operational tools development. Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine is collaborating with other Interreg NEXT programmes to align strategic goals and avoid overlaps in project funding.
- Interact, in close cooperation with Interreg programmes, has been developing tools for synergies. In addition to publications on the topic that provide practical suggestions, the data exchange platform *Index* has been developed. *Index* enables automated data exchange across programmes in a shared geographical area. It helps programmes monitor partner engagement in applications and projects and spot potential synergies early on across shared territories.
- The **Cooperation Actions Map Tool** (cooperationactions.eu) further supports synergies by helping programme authorities and beneficiaries identify potential partners and explore collaboration opportunities beyond Interreg. Open to all interested parties, the tool simplifies the search for cooperation opportunities and facilitates access to diverse funding sources. By using this resource, Interreg beneficiaries can strengthen their projects through partnerships across different funding streams.
- Articles 22 and 63 of the Common Provisions Regulation allow for cooperation actions beyond programme boundaries, making it easier to integrate complementary initiatives.

Capacity building and knowledge sharing

- Peer-to-peer learning and study visits organised by programmes or other cooperation stakeholders are helpful tools to build mutual understanding and improve programme coordination.
- Regular networking events, such as, for example, the Interreg Knowledge Fair, Interreg geographical networks and thematic communities' events facilitated by Interact, help to foster cooperation and knowledge exchange between different Interreg programmes. In addition, broader events like the Interreg Annual Event and the European Week of Regions and Cities provide valuable opportunities for programme representatives to connect, exchange experiences, and explore synergies with other EU funding instruments.

6. How does it work in practice?

The approach used to build synergies between the programmes and funds depends on the context and the programme specificity. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all approach possible or a single approach that programmes can use. This section outlines some successful approaches and practical examples applied by programmes to ensure stronger complementarities between funds and programmes.

Capitalisation approaches and thematic clusters

- In 2014-2020 period **Interreg Central Europe** held a call for projects aiming to coordinate Interreg and Horizon 2020 partners to transfer project results into practical applications in the Central European region. In this funding period, the programme will test improving synergies between transnational and cross-border projects through a dedicated call, “capitalisation through coordination”, to tackle disparities and negative effects of national and inner borders on functional linkages among central European regions.
- **Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) and Interreg Aurora** are building on the existing cooperation experience between both programme stakeholders and have designed a joint [call for Clustering projects](#) to be launched in the autumn of 2025.
- **Multi-Programme Coordination Mechanism in the Mediterranean** bring together seven Interreg programmes for closer coordination. The programmes have approved a joint action plan to enhance the uptake of project results in sustainable tourism.
- For the 2nd period **Interreg Baltic Sea Region** is financing [Project platforms](#). The project platforms bring together projects funded by Interreg programmes and other EU programmes to promote joint learning and policy development.
- Interact Policy Networks supports programmes working with PO1, PO2, PO4 and ISO 1 to exchange on their experiences, ideas and solutions to better address these challenges together. The goal is to develop knowledge to support programme approaches, enhancing project results and impact, and showcase Interreg’s achievements on the different policies (Smarter, Greener, Social and Better Governance) to wider stakeholders and extend their reach. Capitalisation efforts are also supported through tools like, e.g., keep.eu.
- Capitalisation and communication initiatives by Interact, including large scale projects like the Interreg Slam, as a capitalisation tool for increasing visibility of Interreg projects.

Coordination between Interreg and other funds/policies

- The Interreg North Sea programme’s project *COPPER* and the H2020 project *CREATORS* work together on energy transition and decarbonisation initiatives.
- Interreg IPA ADRION leveraged unspent programme funds to launch a call for transnational master’s courses aligned with EU research investments in the Western Balkans. This initiative, initially developed in response to a European Commission recommendation, was later embedded as a strategic project in the 2021-2027 programme. The call, launched in December 2024 supports accredited master’s programmes in at least two IPA ADRION countries. Key requirements include a sustainability plan, a minimum of 25 students per course, and targeted outreach to students from all IPA ADRION countries, including those with fewer opportunities.

The SME Transition Innovation Partners Projects ([STIPP](#)) is an operation of strategic importance supported by the **Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) programme**. Running from July 2024 to December 2029, STIPP aims to enhance the competitiveness and innovation capacity of SMEs within the Meuse-Rhine region. It is implemented in collaboration with six regional development agencies (RDAs) - LIOF, AGIT, NMWP, POM Limburg, VLAIO Team Bedrijfstrajecten, and WEAS, covering the entire programme area. This partnership helps to ensure comprehensive support to both project development and implementation.

STIPP is a pioneer and unique in having a trinational setup. This is exemplary for the foundations of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), whose strength stems from the complexity of three nationalities working in one program area.

STIPP consists of two key components: STIPP Business & Innovation Development Support (BIDS) and STIPP SME Grants:

- **STIPP BIDS** can be considered the front-office, in which the six RDAs execute the responsibility to provide guidance in the implementation of the SME-projects. The RDAs were deliberately selected for their extensive professional networks and expertise in fostering cross-border collaboration. Their involvement also facilitates synergies with neighbouring programmes, including Interreg Flanders-Netherlands and OSI Crossroads, ensuring SMEs are directed to the most suitable funding opportunities. Inherently, a structural exchange between the Interreg programmes takes place in these collaborations.
- **STIPP SME Grants** is managed by the Province of Limburg, in its role as Managing Authority of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine, serving as the Fund Manager for STIPP. It oversees the full grant management process, from launching calls and assessing eligibility to disbursing funds for SME consortia.

The integration of STIPP BIDS and STIPP SME Grants ensures a multi-layered approach, guaranteeing the necessary combination of expertise to carry out an instrument of this scale. The programme partners of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) ultimately monitor the high-quality implementation of STIPP.

Interreg funding helps SME consortia to develop high-quality innovation projects addressing industrial transition, green transformation, and healthier citizens. When successful, STIPP lowers the burden for SMEs in the Meuse-Rhine Region to involve in cross-border collaboration, using Interreg as catalyser.

The role of macro-regional and sea basin strategies

At the point of writing (March 2025), there are four EU MRS (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EU Strategy for the Danube Region, EU Strategy for the Alpine Region and EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region) and three SBS (Western Mediterranean (WestMED) initiative, Atlantic Maritime Strategy, and Common maritime agenda for the Black Sea). These strategies 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.

Interreg and IJG programmes are tasked with considering the MRS and SBS priorities when setting up a programme whose area is wholly or partially covered by one or more strategies (Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Article 17(3)(b)(iv), and CPR, Article 22(3)(a)(viii)). Moreover, transnational Interreg programmes whose territories overlap with a macro-regional or sea basin strategy have a special role in supporting these strategies (Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Article 15(3)).

While further efforts are needed to fully capitalise on the cooperation potential between funding programmes and strategies, recent years have seen intensified efforts to strengthen dialogue between MRS and SBS stakeholders and funding programmes. This aims to improve coordination of funding efforts and maximise the impact of investments.

To support this coordination, managing authorities' networks and financial dialogues have been established in all four MRS and in some cases also SBS. These networks bring together programmes within macro-regions and sea basins. They are either initiated by managing authorities themselves or facilitated by macro-regional stakeholders.

- In the Baltic Sea region, there are two MA networks working: the network of the ERDF regional and national programmes and the Baltic Sea Network ESF. Similarly, there are two MA networks in the [Danube region](#), including also authorities from Interreg programmes. In the Alpine region

there are several funding dialogues organised focusing on selected topics, such as, for example, green hydrogen. **EUSAIR Action Lab** is designed to strengthen synergies between Interreg programmes in the Mediterranean and support the EUSAIR embedding.

- **Atlantic Area Managing Authorities** Network facilitated by Interreg Atlantic Area programme supports dialogue between Managing Authorities of Interreg and regional programmes.

Geographical networks

- **Interact-facilitated/supported geographical networks in the** Atlantic Area, Baltic Sea, Central and South East Europe, Mediterranean (MedLab), and North West Europe networks foster transnational and cross-border collaboration, opening the discussions to other Funds and Policies and ensuring equal footing for all participating programmes. These networks following the needs of each area and based on the principle that “not all sizes fit all”, they have different approaches but with a common goal to facilitate synergies avoid duplications of actions and funding through dialogue

Synergies between Interreg and IJG programmes

- Interact supports the implementation of **cooperation actions as a management practice**, facilitating the transfer of know-how and best practices from Interreg to IJG programmes. Given that IJG programmes have limited experience in structured cooperation, Interact provides guidance and capacity-building support to help programme authorities integrate collaborative approaches into their funding strategies. One key initiative is tailored coaching and knowledge transfer, which helps IJG programmes design and implement cooperation actions in alignment with Interreg methodologies. Additionally, Interact fosters networking and peer-learning by organising exchanges between managing authorities and joint secretariats, allowing them to share practical experiences and capitalise through Interreg. To further support this process, Interact is promoting best practices and dedicated capacity-building events.

The Prespa Lake region, a cross-border area between Greece and North Macedonia, has benefited from a coordinated funding approach that integrates not only Interreg IPA resources but also other EU and national funds.

Within the framework of the **INTERREG VI-A IPA Greece – North Macedonia 2021-2027 Programme**, a strategic project is currently being implemented to establish a border crossing point at Lemos in Greece and Markova Noga in North Macedonia. The project focuses on enhancing border infrastructure, improving connectivity, and fostering regional development. A key feature is the integration of multiple funding sources to finance complementary interventions, ensuring the sustainability and functionality of the border crossing point. The INTERREG VI-A IPA Greece – North Macedonia Programme 2021-2027 provides funding for essential infrastructure works, namely the construction of a new building for customs and police control in Greece and the renovation of the existing police station in North Macedonia. Meanwhile, the Hellenic Ministry of Interior finances the construction of the 3 km road connection linking the border crossing to the national road network in Greece. Additional financial support is leveraged from the EU4Prespa Programme for the construction of the customs building on the side of North Macedonia.

Ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of the Lemos – Markova Noga border crossing requires a holistic approach that integrates staffing, infrastructure, technology, and seamless coordination between public authorities in Greece and North Macedonia. Adequate personnel, including customs and border police officers, must be well-trained and deployed, while capacity-building joint initiatives should be established to enhance expertise and operational effectiveness. The implementation of standardized customs procedures and coordinated emergency response strategies is crucial for ensuring efficiency and security. Moreover, financial and administrative support, coupled with

transparent public communication, will be key to maintaining the long-term functionality of the border crossing.

7. Reference to other, more-detailed papers

- Cooperation actions in IJG programmes – guidelines, interactive map, brochure with examples and more: <https://www.interact.eu/synergies-and-cooperation/investments-for-jobs-and-growth/cooperation-actions>

Disclaimer: Cooperation can be complex, and while Interact’s job is to make it easier, Interact cannot offer assurances on the accuracy of our pan-European information in any specific context.

Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

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Publisher | Interact programme
Date | 26.02.2025
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