

Cooperation actions

Service-based approach supporting programmes under the IJG goal

Background

The European Union, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the Investment for Jobs and Growth (IJG) goal, has recognized the strategic importance of cooperation actions, as outlined in Article 22(3)(d)(vi) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. These actions aim to foster collaboration between programmes and stakeholders across different regions and Member States, with a focus on identifying synergies, leveraging shared priorities, and promoting interregional and transnational partnerships to address common challenges. Building on experiences from the 2014–2020 programming period, including a pilot mapping project by Interact, the 2021–2027 period continues this effort with greater emphasis on thematic codification, data visualization, and accessible communication tools.

Within the legal and strategic framework set out in Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, cooperation actions are integrated into cohesion policy as mechanisms for harmonizing and simplifying interregional collaboration. Under Article 3(3)(c)(ii) of Regulation 2021/1059, the Interact programme plays a key role in supporting the promotion of experience exchange, innovative approaches, and capacity building.

Target group

The main target group of the project are **managing authorities of national or regional programmes under the Investment for Jobs and Growth goal**. Special emphasis is given to those of them with the intention to start building-up active cooperation action partnerships in 2025 and proceed with their implementation in 2026.

In general, the target group does not cover managing authorities of Interreg programmes, apart from the cases when the same administrative body manages both Interreg programmes and mainstream IJG goal programmes.

Timeline

2014–2020: Pilot mapping project completed by Interact, analyzing more than 300 programmes and publishing the initial interactive map and guidelines.

2021-2022: consultancy and support to the managing authority of Basilicata region in Italy, related to launching of their first call for cooperation actions.

2023: Production of Interactive map tool for cooperation actions, analyzing more than 700 programmes and update of the main website embedding the tool.

2024: Setting up of repository of knowledge on the topic of cooperation actions, as a subpage on Interact's website.

2024-2025: Organisation of two workshops.

2024-2025: consultancy and support to the managing authority of Croatia ESF+, related to launching of their first call for cooperation actions.

Service-Based Approach

The cooperation actions support initiative by Interact is anchored in a service-oriented framework that includes analysis, thematic mapping, data structuring, and web-based dissemination tools.

In order to support the process of setting up of management system for cooperation actions, Interact elaborated the **Operational Guidelines 2021-2027**, which provides a structured framework for incorporating interregional and transnational cooperation into Cohesion Policy programmes under the IJG goal. The document serves as a practical manual for managing authorities and outlines a spectrum of cooperation intensities - from basic knowledge-sharing to fully integrated joint actions - and provides implementation steps, legal references, and applied examples. The guidelines also underscore the strategic value of embedding cooperation into wider territorial development instruments, including macro-regional and sea basin strategies, thereby enhancing policy coherence and fostering collaborative regional development across the European Union.

For the purposes of assisting managing authorities in the partner search process , Interact produced the **Interactive Map Tool**, including the following:

- Extraction and analysis of programme data to identify cooperation-relevant content across national and regional operational programmes.
- Development of a keyword-based thematic coding system aligned with the five Policy Objectives defined in Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.
- Creation of an interactive web platform to display potential cooperation areas and partners.
- Restructuring of databases to allow multi-criteria querying and visualization.

This approach facilitates structured identification of potential synergies across programmes and offers a user-friendly interface for stakeholders and managing authorities. As a result, the Interactive map tool is available at: <https://www.cooperationactions.eu/>



In order to further support the efforts of managing authorities in setting up their cooperation actions management systems, Interact offered a **consultation and coaching service**. The Interact team provided targeted consultations to the Croatian ESF+ Managing Authority to support the design and implementation of their first call for cooperation actions. This assistance focused on detailing the eligibility criteria for activities under the theme of Regional Competence Centres, advising practical execution and strategic planning. Interact guided the Croatian authority through a comparative assessment of possible actions and their compatibility with existing management and control systems. Recommendations included selecting the most suitable Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) to enable a smooth launch in 2025 and to ensure efficient fund utilization. Proposed activities encompassed a wide range - from mobility programmes and skills competitions to green projects and digital learning innovations - reflecting a comprehensive and future-oriented cooperation strategy.

Another form of support Interact provides on regular basis, are the **workshops for IJG goal managing authorities**, organised in partnership with the European Commission. The events are designed to support managing authorities of national and regional programmes and aim to address the complexities of implementing cooperation actions. Participants engage in discussions on overcoming persistent barriers, share best practices from existing programmes, and explore practical tools and methodologies for planning, implementing, and managing cooperation actions. Key components include the introduction of variety of support tools and insights into embedding cooperation within broader territorial development strategies. This initiative underscores Interact's

commitment to fostering effective cross-border collaboration and enhancing the strategic capacity of programme authorities within the EU framework.

Key Achievements

- **Creation of a comprehensive database identifying potential cooperation actions** under the 2014-202 and 2021–2027 programming periods. Integration of the 2014–2020 map archive and new content into a redesigned and modernized platform. Successful deployment of an interactive web-based map tool, improving the accessibility of cooperation opportunities: <https://www.cooperationactions.eu/>
- **Standardized thematic classification** for cross-programme analysis. Enhanced filtering and custom inquiry features for easier identification of cooperation opportunities.
- **Set up repository of knowledge**, containing guidelines, examples, and other types of useful information. It is available as a separate section under Interact's website: <https://www.interact.eu/synergies-and-cooperation/investments-for-jobs-and-growth/cooperation-actions>
- **Strengthened collaboration and dialogue** between Interact, programme managing authorities, and stakeholders. This is achieved throughout series of workshops and networking, in partnership with the European Commission.
- **Practical application example of consultancy** to the ESF+ Managing Authority of Croatia in launching its first cooperation actions call. The consultation covered: clarification of eligible activities, joint development of activity lists, review of management and control system, advice on selecting the most appropriate Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) and general support for preparing a call in 2025. This coaching exercise could be repeated with the next calls for proposals by the ESF+ Managing Authority of Croatia.
- **Participation in events with strategic partners:** Coop Matrix and staff training events by DG Regio, application for session at the EWRC 2025, Per review project by Interreg Europe, participation in Macro-Regional Strategy Days, etc.

Publicity

To maximize visibility and user engagement, the cooperation actions have been supported by targeted communication efforts including:

- **Publication of brochures** such as the 2024 Interact cooperation actions brochure outlining goals and practices, expected to be updated with a second edition in 2025.
- **Promotion through Interact's official website, social media, newsletter and events.**

- **Availability of online tools and guidelines** for programme authorities to explore and replicate good practices.
- Emphasis on **transparent access to data and collaboration tools** through the redesigned cooperationactions.eu portal.

In the form of specific requests, Interact encourages managing authorities and stakeholders to:

- **Advertise the interactive map.**
- **Provide honest feedback** for future improvements.
- **Invite Interact to events** dedicated to cooperation actions.

This integrated approach on publicity, ensures that the benefits and methodologies of cooperation actions are widely known, user-driven, and replicable, supporting a more cohesive and innovative development strategy.

Contact

Interact office Valencia

Stoyan Kanatov, stoyan.kanatov@interact.eu