

Visibility sprint: Turning cross-border results into impactful messages

EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders | 19-20 May 2026

Overview

Cross-border programmes deliver real change across and beyond the EU. But that value is not always visible beyond the “usual suspects”. In this interactive Comms Lab, participants worked in groups to exchange ideas on how to transform Interreg achievements (such as project stories or programme data) into citizen-facing messages that demonstrate results, reinforce European values, and support the enlargement and neighbourhood agenda.

Methodology

The session was a breakout sub-session within the first round of the parallel sessions in the event. It combined two group exercises including Q&A, one Interact presentation and one programme presentation.

Key discussion points

Following questions were addressed:

- Identifying the potential targets within the enlargement context: Who do we want to reach out to? When we talk about “non-usual suspects”, who could they be? (a mayor / EU delegation / journalist) What are the occasions to contact them, and what do we want them to do?
- Identifying the challenges in communicating EU cooperation/Interreg to these audiences— how to address these challenges? How shall we craft the message – what is the most valuable element of Interreg cooperation to highlight?
- What should non-Interreg audiences (a person or group) remember about what we do?

Main takeaways

The session started with an icebreaker activity as a warm up activity. Participants were asked to work in groups and build the highest possible standing structure using spaghetti pieces, tape, string and a marshmallow. The idea was to reveal how thinking simple at times could lead to success in communicating cooperation instead of overthinking and complex discussions before action.

The group discussions confirmed that communicating Interreg and EU cooperation beyond the usual programme audience requires a clear shift from processes, acronyms and institutional language to tangible, local benefits. Participants repeatedly underlined that audiences need to see why cooperation matters for them, in their municipality, school, business, media outlet or community.

- Potential target groups were defined broadly: local and regional decision-makers, mayors, municipal services, youth, youth NGOs at municipal level, civil society organisations, journalists and media. These groups were seen as important multipliers because they can translate cooperation results into local relevance, public attention and practical action.

- Participants identified concrete moments to engage these audiences, including project launches, workshops and consultation meetings, dissemination events, press conferences, public awareness campaigns, relevant local and regional events such as festivals and conferences, and opportunities to publish articles, short videos or other event-related content.
- The main communication barriers were complexity, technical jargon, limited interest or perceived relevance, lack of resources and competition for attention. The proposed response was to use clear and simple language, focus on benefits and impacts, tailor the message to the audience, rely on personal contact where possible, and build partnerships with actors who already have the audience's trust.
- A recurring theme was that tools are secondary to the message. Participants stressed that communication should not start with a channel or format, but with the benefit angle: what changed, for whom, and why it matters. Examples discussed included framing cooperation as a life-changing experience for young people, or showing how joint action improves safety, services, opportunities or quality of life.
- The Montenegro presentation reinforced the same direction: lead with the result, not the process; strip away administrative language; localise the story through recognisable places and people; use visual proof; and make the EU contribution tangible in everyday life. In the context of enlargement and neighbourhood cooperation, Interreg can be presented as "EU today" - a practical way of building European standards and trust before accession.
- The one-line message emerging from the discussions was: Interreg is making our region a better place to live and work by bringing people together to solve shared challenges.

Follow-up actions / next steps

Participants expressed appreciation for Interact's efforts to bring programmes from various strands together and enable exchanges and expressed willingness to contribute in future initiatives in that direction.

Session team

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