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# Strengthening institutional and administrative capacity through ISO1.

Kelly Zielniewski, Besiana Ninka / 09.06.2026

**Interact**



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# Events for 2026

## Webinar 1

How Interreg programmes have used **ISO1 to overcome legal and administrative obstacles**, harmonise procedures, and set up joint solutions across borders.

## Webinar 2

**How ISO1 has strengthened institutions**, by creating durable cooperation structures. Concrete examples of institutional set-ups **that ensure alignment, sustainability, and long-term impact** and how well-designed structures can evolve into effective solutions for better governance and long-term collaboration will be shared.

## Webinar 3

**How ISO1 acts as a driver for developing and sustaining cross-border public services.** By tackling legal and administrative barriers, strengthening institutional cooperation, and fostering trust, ISO1 projects pave the way for joint solutions that directly benefit citizens in border regions.

# Agenda Webinar

**09:40 – 10:30**

**Interreg approaches & practices to strengthen institutional capacity**

**10:30 – 10:45**

**From experience to guidance for Post27**

**10:45 – 11:00**

**InterregGov updates**

# Strengthening **institutional capacity** through ISO

Oana Cristea, IPA Romania - Serbia

Clara Euzénat, Interreg GRENZCAP project & Anne Thevenet, Euro-Institut

Johannes Gabriel, Interreg Danube Region

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# ISO1 in Interreg IPA Romania–Serbia

**Strengthening institutional capacity  
through cross-border cooperation**

**Case study: SAFE Project**



# Programme geography



- **3 Romanian counties and 6 Serbian districts**
- Population: approx. 2.2 million
- Border length: **548 km out of which 235 km (42,8%) on the Danube River**
- Along this common border there are **8 road border crossings, 2 railroad crossings and 3 fluvial crossing.**

# Why ISO1 ?

- fragmented institutional cooperation;
- different administrative systems;
- weak coordination mechanisms;
- uneven institutional capacity;
- limited interoperability;

Governance  
challenges  
identified



- illegal migration
- cross-border criminal activity
- poor connectivity
- rural isolation
- weak access to services
- need for joint responses

Territorial  
challenges



# Why ISO1 ?

IPA CBC external border programmes aim at **preparing the candidate and pre-candidate countries for their EU membership**, including by helping **setting up mechanisms, systems and procedures** (*aligned with MS's*) in preparing the perspective of future internal borders.



# What ISO1 enables



## **Institutional cooperation:**

- joint operational frameworks
- permanent dialogue structures
- cross-border governance mechanisms



## **Capacity building:**

- joint training
- knowledge transfer
- harmonization of practices



## **Operational cooperation:**

- information exchange
- coordinated interventions
- joint planning



## **Infrastructure & interoperability:**

- compatible equipment
- shared systems
- operational readiness – faster reaction



# How?

Through the implementation of an operation of strategic importance:

“Safer climate within the Romanian-Serbian border area”  
(SAFE)

Duration: 36 months

Budget: €13.8 million

5 partners:

- Territorial Inspectorate for Border Police Timisoara;
- Ministry of Interior, Republic of Serbia,
- School for Improvement of Training of Romanian Border Police Personnel Drobeta Turnu Severin;
- General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police;
- General Inspectorate of the Romanian Gendarmerie

# What challenges is SAFE addressing



- criminal networks operating across borders
- inefficient isolated responses
- insufficient operational coordination
- fragmented institutional responses
- incompatible procedures/equipment

# How was cooperation strengthened ?

- Modernized training facility;
- Procurement of specialized equipment for border surveillance and joint training;
- Exchange of best practices and know-how on specific areas of activity;
- Joint trainings of border police personnel, in the field of land and blue border management;
- Common policies and strategies in the field of border management;
- Revised Joint Operational Plan ensuring a common operational language



# Institutional Improvements



## Stronger operational cooperation between institutions

- **5 organizations cooperating permanently across borders;**
- **continuous bilateral coordination mechanisms established;**
- **updated Joint Operational Plan for coordinated responses;**
- **institutional dialogue strengthened through regular meetings and exchanges;**
- **Romanian and Serbian authorities now operate through more aligned procedures and communication channels.**

## Improved interoperability and response capacity

- **surveillance systems and specialized equipment** procured on both sides of the border
- **docking facility operationalized**
- **surveillance infrastructure** developed in Serbia – to match RO
- **interoperable equipment** - reduces technical gaps between institutions
- **faster and more coordinated responses** to illegal migration and cross-border crime

# Capacity Building Results

## Joint training & common operational culture

- 436 participations in joint training schemes
- 336 personnel trained in land border management
- 100 personnel trained in blue border management
- common operational language and shared practices developed
- training aligned with EU and FRONTEX standards



# Territorial Impact

## Safer and more stable border area

- improved security climate in the Romania–Serbia border region
- stronger prevention of illegal migration and cross-border criminality
- better conditions for economic stability, investment and tourism
- contribution to Serbia’s gradual alignment with EU and Schengen-related standards



## Back to ISO 1

This type of cooperation would have been difficult without **ISO1**, since it enabled:

- **long-term institutional partnerships;**
- **integrated cross-border governance;**
- **joint strategic planning;**
- **combined investment + training + cooperation;**
- **transfer of EU practices, standards & procedures.**

# Recommendations & lessons learnt

- invest in TRUST-BUILDING
- COMBINE HARD + SOFT measures
- ensure CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE
- prioritize INTEROPERABILITY
- create JOINT OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORKS
- support LONG-TERM COOPERATION NETWORKS
- TRUST COMES FROM DAILY & ONGOING COOPERATION



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Interreg



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# GRENZCAP

Strengthening competencies and developing a systematic consideration of the border context in administrations in the Upper Rhine Region



Strasbourg Kehl

# Wo are we?

**Euro  
Institut**



Fortbildungen  
Formation



Studien  
Études



Begleitung  
Accompagnement



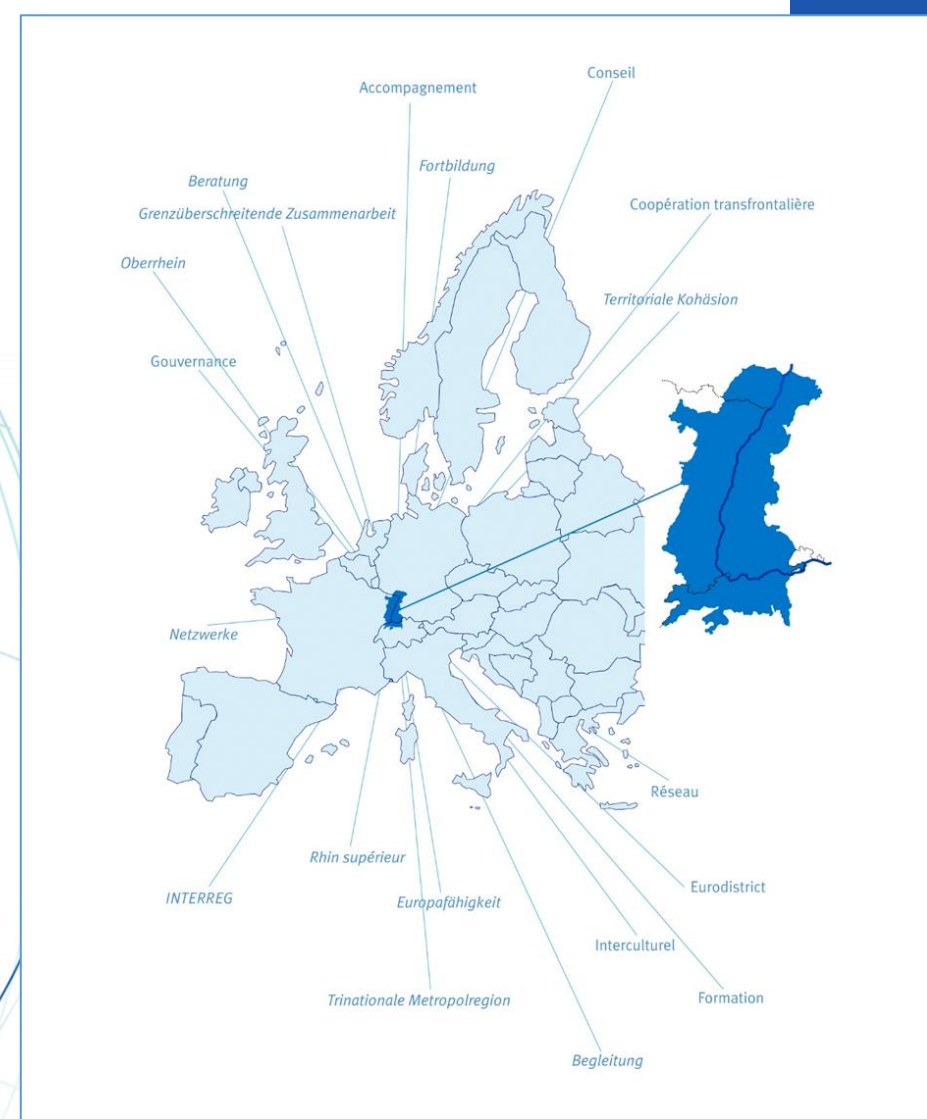
Netzwerkarbeit  
Travail en réseau



Projekte  
Projets



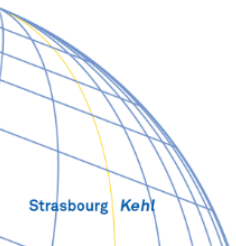
Angewandte Forschung  
Recherche appliquée



## Initial context and challenge of the project

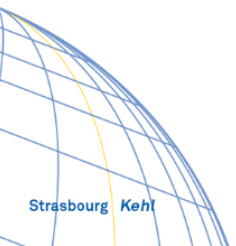
- The current offering is insufficient.
- Cross-border cooperation is still often complex for administrations / public authorities: differing systems and a lack of strategic coordination hinder exchange.
- Are decision-makers equipped and trained to overcome these obstacles?
- Is there a cross-border ‚instinct‘ / ‚reflex‘?
- Context: Crisis situations, high staff turnover, and constraints on public finances
- Improved & strengthened cooperation on both sides of the Rhine for public administrations to respond more quickly, clearly and effectively to the challenges of a cross-border region.

**This is where GRENZCAP comes in!**



## Key informations

- Specific Objective E.1: To contribute to the effectiveness of public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation, as well as cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular with a view to addressing legal and other barriers in border regions
- Project lead : Euro-Institut
- 12 partners from across the Upper Rhine region : 1 operational partner, 4 co-funding partners, 7 associated partners
- Project duration : 01.08.2025 – 31.12.2027 → still ongoing
- Total budget : 1 050 270,08€ (of which 630 162,05€ from EU funding) - 60%



# Project approach of GRENZCAP : Building cross-border competencies and establishing a cross-border reflex for a better administrative cooperation



Encouragement

Capacity building  
& new tools

Visibility of  
cooperation



# GRENZCAP : Concrete tools to be developed during the project & expected outcomes

## WP5:

### Training for (future) decision-makers (m/f/d)

- **Definition of decision-makers**
- **Competency framework** for (future) decision-makers (high-level civil servants and elected representatives) who are expected to work in a cross-border context
- **Bilingual training offer**
  - Preferred formats: short videos, factsheets, thematic visits, short training sessions (MOOC, 1 hour per topic)
  - Content: political-administrative system, governance in the Upper Rhine region, interculturality

## WP6:

### Short-term job shadowing in the neighbouring administration for public sector staff

- **Up to 5 days** of job shadowing in the neighbouring administration
- Ideal-typical procedure
- **Mapping of responsibilities** for „matching“ (matrix)
- **Legal study** (agreements)
- **Support program** for secondment participants
- Host organization guide
- Alumni network
- Roadmap to increase the number of job shadowing in neighbouring administrations

## WP7:

### Cross-border reflex in the design and implementation of local and regional public policies

- Working **definition** of the **cross-border reflex** : systematic consideration of the potential impact of a public policy or administrative measure on the cross-border dimension
- **Toolbox** with criteria/analysis methods to identify cross-border potential and impact
- **Training concept** for staff to acquire and use these tools
- Compendium of effective instruments for introducing/developing the cross-border reflex in administrations

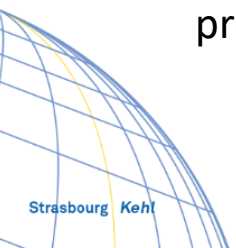
# GRENZCAP : Capacity-building dimension & long-term perspective

- Capacity-building :
  - GRENZCAP raises awareness or serves as a reminder, bringing cross-border cooperation into the spotlight (interviews and online survey during initial assessment)
  - Content: political-administrative system, governance in the Upper Rhine region, interculturality
  - Simpler identification of the appropriate contact person despite the imbalance in competences between the administrative bodies of the three countries
- First concrete results :
  - 1 new bilateral agreement on short-term job-shadowings signed, more to come
  - 1 first on-site training course held, more to come in addition to the short and digital training formats
- Ripple effect



# Added value of GRENZCAP

- Without GRENZCAP, no mandate : necessary resources (both human and financial) to develop suitable formats
  - Reactivating cross-border networks and bringing in new stakeholders
  - Administrative and institutional cooperation in a cross-border context can not be reinforced through an isolated approach
  - Project-based approach :
    - Discussing this with everyone helps us to better compare and identify both specific and general needs
    - It also lends greater legitimacy to our work and allows a greater impact through the dissemination of results
  - Consistency and complementarity between the long-term vision of moving towards the cross-border reflex (soft tool) and the concrete measures needed to achieve it: The project enables us to set a more ambitious common goal, to go beyond the one-shot logic, to adopt a multilateral approach, and to get everyone on board with the GRENZCAP adventure
  - Long-term effects :
    - Creating sustainable and lasting tools and formats made available to the administrations
    - Fostering personal encounters & cross-border networks on which cooperation relies
    - Developing and deepening a local and regional cross-border reflex
    - How to use, maintain and develop the tools created by GRENZCAP after 2027?
- Strengthen a better european cooperation governance through mutual (intercultural) understanding and by preventing and removing obstacles.

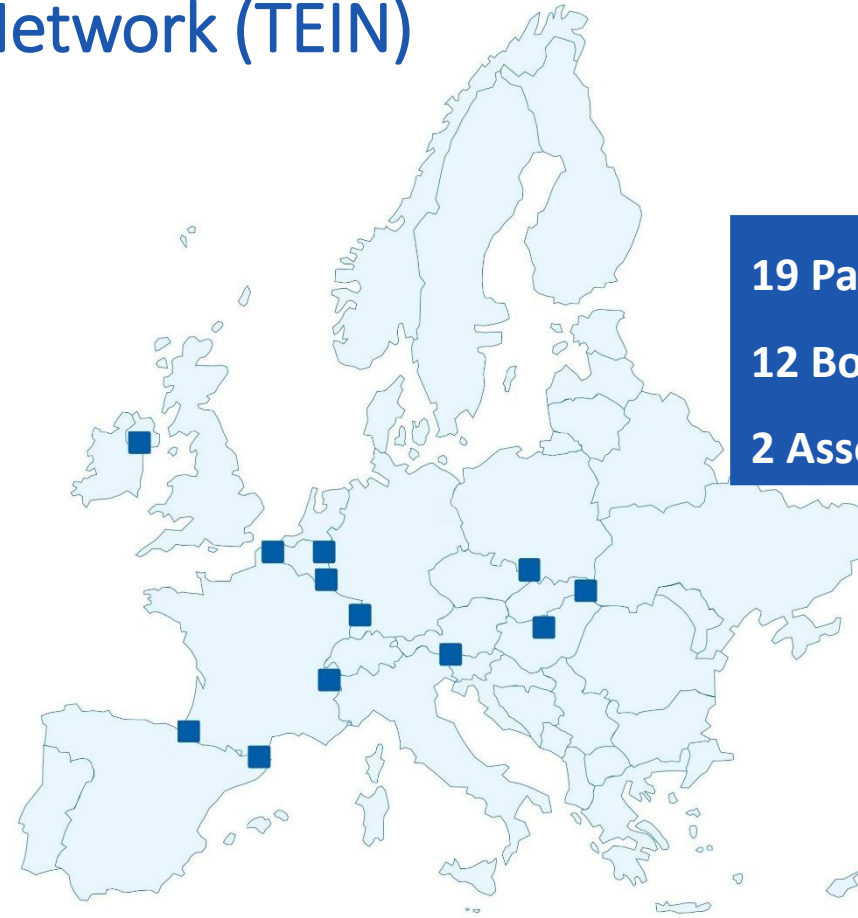




# Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN)

European network of excellence in cross-border training, research and support

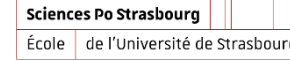
**19 Partners**  
**12 Borders**  
**2 Associated Members**



## TEIN aims to :

- Facilitate cross-border cooperation
- Provide practical solutions to actors
- Strengthen the capacity of actors
- Provide applied research for cooperation
- Strengthen European integration

» [www.transfrontier.eu](http://www.transfrontier.eu)





# Thank you very much for your attention!

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Anne Thevenet

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**Interreg  
Danube Region**



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# **ISO1 - Strategic Coordination and Governance in a multi-level Cooperation environment in the Danube Region**

Interact Webinar on ISO1

Johannes Gabriel, DRP

9th June 2026, online

# Content

- Main governance challenges in the Danube Region
- DRP approach
- Institutional capacity building dimension
- Achievements under ISO1: first trends & findings
- Lessons learned

# Main DR governance challenges



- Highly fragmented cooperation space (e.g. almost the half of DR territories are CBC territories)
  - Few policy interventions do *not* have transboundary impact - but the institutional capacities for common action are limited
- High diversity in terms of administrative and socio-economic development paths
- Accession process: 5 accession countries are DR members ...
- Hot spot DR: Security, demographic decline, urban-rural polarisation, ....

# DRP Approach

## ISO1 (approx. 44 MIO EUR Interreg Funds)

### S.O.4.1 MRS / EUSDR support

- Direct support to EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators
- Direct support to an Danube Strategy Point
- EUSDR Seed Money Facility

### S.O.4.2 A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region

- „Regular” projects (12 ongoing, 2 further to be financed)

# DRP Approach

## Synergies between the 2 governance-related Specific Objectives

### S.O.4.1 MRS / EUSDR support

- General (all S.O.s) thematic alignment of DRP to EUSDR
- Assessment criteria for ensuring EUSDR relevance of all regular projects
- Capitalisation activities under strong involvement of EUSDR
  - Joint DRP-EUSDR assessment of SMF proposals
  - Plenty of incremental cooperation between EUSDR and DRP projects

### S.O.4.2 A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region

# DRP Approach

## S.O.4.2 A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region

### What we finance

- Integrated governance models for addressing challenges arising from demographic change (e. g. aging, depopulation, brain drain);
- Integrated urban-rural governance models including specific territorial development strategies for rural/remote areas as well as accessibility aspects and transport bottlenecks;
- Support for more and stronger inter-institutional relations for the integrated development of transboundary functional areas;
- Capacity building considering especially a better involvement of local and regional public bodies as well as civic actors in transnational policy making, territorial development frameworks and governance models;

# DRP Approach

## S.O.4.2 A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region

### Whom do we address

- Local and regional (public) bodies are expected to be at the core of each partnership, since those actors are the closest to their communities, offering many essential public services and having in-depth knowledge on the needs of civil society and businesses.
- Civil Society Organisations and private actors (e. g. SMEs, private service operators) as further indispensable pillars of the envisaged governance schemes.
- Support organizations (chambers of commerce, employment agencies, expert bodies in the field of urban or rural-urban development and similar).
- National public bodies, EUSDR-related actors and international organizations for adding policy-relevance and strategic momentum (to be involved either as financing or strategic PP).
- Academia and further knowledge providers.

# Institutional capacity building dimension

- Contribution of DRP governance-related projects to:
  - Strengthening coordination capacity and cooperation culture across 14 countries (9 EU-member and 5 accession countries)
  - Joint development of governance models with out-of-the-box character
  - Strategic alignment within certain policy fields (mainly covered by EUSDR PA10, e.g. territorial, urban-rural development, smart communities, civic engagement, ...)
  - Substantial involvement of stakeholders of the fields concerned
  - Institutional learning (Sound mix of experienced actors and „newcomer“ or less experienced PPs)

# Institutional capacity building dimension

- Contribution to multi-level governance:
  - Cross-sectorial, multilevel approach is at the core of DRP Priority 4, financed projects in fact are „different“:
    - More colorful PP-mix regarding types of institutions, sectors concerned and admin. levels
    - More substantial involvement of local public actors and local actors from deprived/remote rural areas
    - Engagement of civic actors remains a challenge, but improvements could be achieved
    - Engagement of (national) policy drivers remains a challenge, but also here positive trends (EUSDR plays an important role in this context, though related potentials are under-exploited)

# Achievements under ISO1: first findings and trends

- ISO1 allows to fund/implement project-type(s) which complement the more sectorial DRP project portfolio
- To build substantial linkages to both the policy level and civic/grassroot level remains a challenge for most projects BUT
- ... positive trends be observed also here and the involvement of local public actors is surprisingly strong
- Good stakeholder outreach, rural dimension is addressed
- Limited comparability of ISO1 projects
- A consistent understanding of the degree to which institutional capacity is strengthened (and the *territorial impact* of this) is challenging ...

# Lessons learned

- ISO1 can enrich (filling gaps, complementing sectorial measures) a Programme's portfolio through a specific project type
- ISO1 can help to sharpen the territorial relevance of a Programme
- ISO1 help to involve actors in TN cooperation which otherwise are very difficult to mobilize
- The visibility of ISO1 as a Programme S.O. is sub-optimal (since the single projects funded under it are very diverse – critical mass?)
- Experience DRP 3rd CfP (assessment phase): a definition of clear(er) thematic corridors within the wide field of ISO1 creates orientation and stimulates interest (not the other way around)

# From experience to guidance for Post27

Moderated discussion

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# InterregGov

## Updates

Unda Ozolina, team leader

Alicia Richert, People-to-people cooperation expert

Ivana Djuranovic-Veselinov, Cross-border cooperation expert

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# InterregGov updates

**Turning Cross-Border Challenges into Shared Solutions**

9 June 2026

# InterregGov

- InterregGov is a European Commission initiative implemented by the City of Vienna, designed to support Interreg CBC programmes in strengthening cooperation governance and building practical solutions for border regions.
- The initiative combines capacity building, practical guidance, and tailor-made support to help Interreg programmes unlock the full potential of ISO1 implementation

# Who we are

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# The added value

**Practical implementation support to utilise ISO1 as a solution to the existing obstacles and people to people issues within Interreg.**

## **Complementarity:**

We amplify, not duplicate

## **Considering and cooperating:**

- Interact – programme capacity & networks
- AEBR / BSolutions – obstacle cases and possible solutions
- BRIDGEforEU – legal framework

# A project based on two pillars

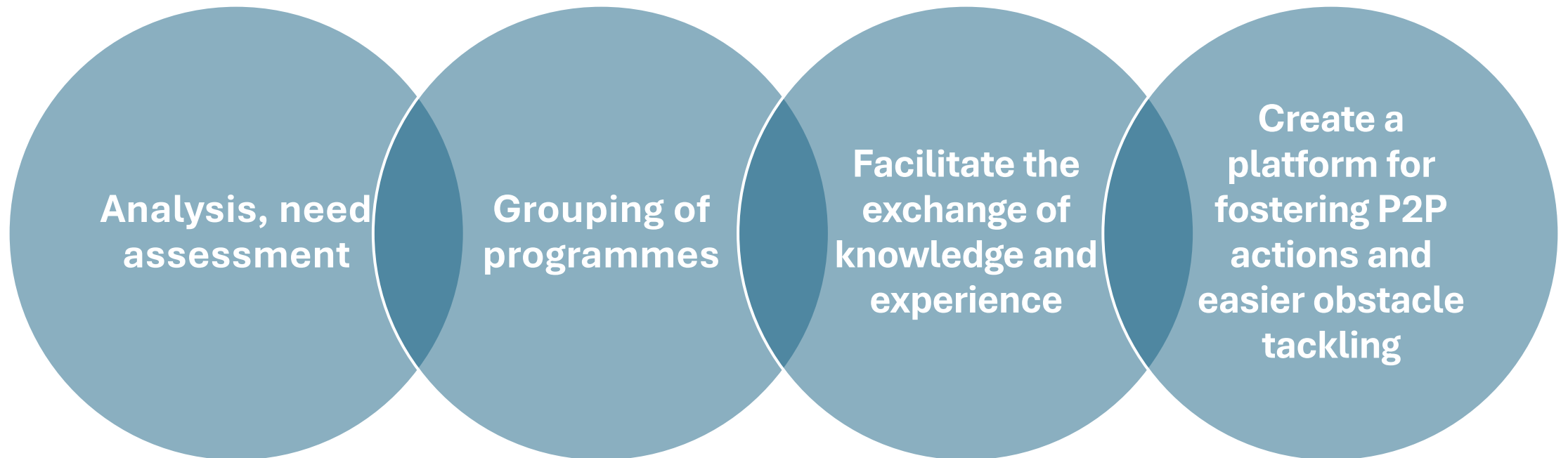
## Pillar 1

General  
ISO1  
Support to  
CBC  
Programmes

## Pillar 2

Tailor-Made  
Support to  
Selected  
CBC  
Programmes

# What will we do for both pillars?



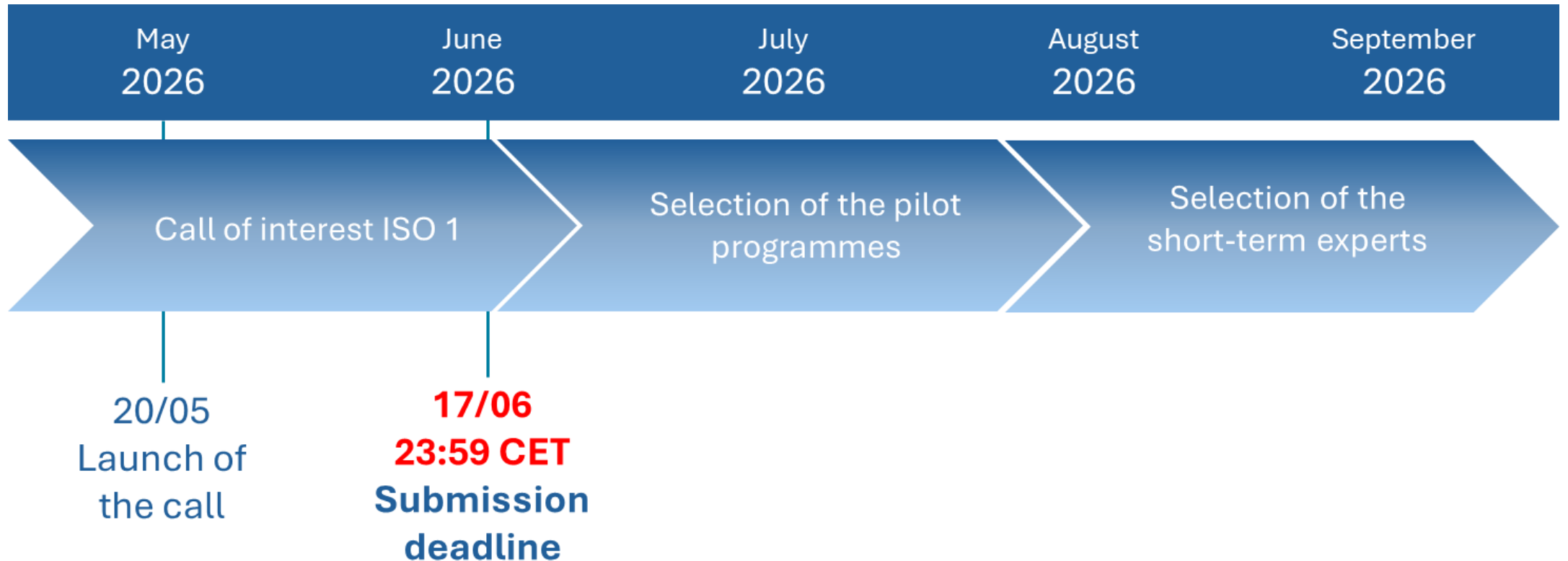
# What do you get by engaging?

- Expert advisory at no cost
- Easy/flexible participation
- Guidance documents and catalogue of good practices
- Capacity building
- Specific knowledge and experience exchange within Interreg programmes
- Tailored support  $\approx$ 12 selected programmes receiving deeper support

# Call for Pilot Programmes

- Launched on 20 May 2026 /submission deadline **17 June 2026**
- For whom?
  - Interreg VI A programmes
- For what?
  - To support programmes in addressing challenges in implementing ISO1
- Link to application
  - [Interreg Governance Facility – Call for Applications for Tailor-Made Assistance under ISO1 \(Seite 1 von 6\)](#)

# Timeline of the Call for tailored-support



# Timeline of the tailored support



**Looking forward for your applications and cooperation!**

**Any question?**



**info@interreggov.eu**



# Thank you for being here!

Your opinion matters to us.

Please take a few minutes to provide us with feedback to help us improve our services.



# Cooperation works

All materials will be available on:  
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Want to discuss it? Join our MS Teams environment!  
[Portal.Interact.eu](https://Portal.Interact.eu) | Programme and Project Management

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Name(s)

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