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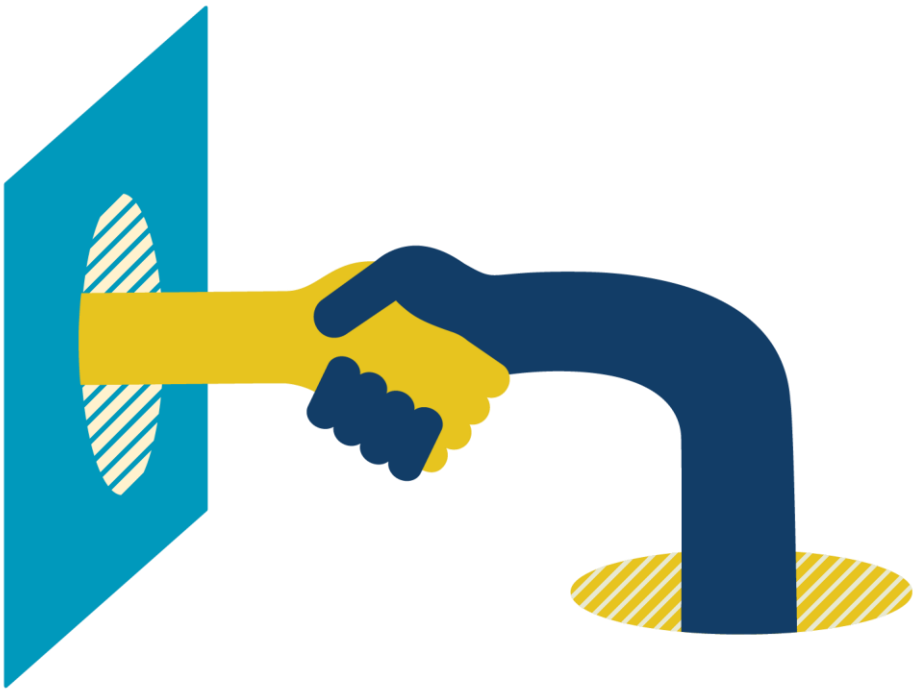
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Interreg projects: reforming the territory

November 2026

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What happens when a project ends? Experiences in healthcare, employment, education and tourism show how Interreg results can influence institutional practice and open the way to lasting territorial change.



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1. From cooperation to change

Cooperation can bring institutions together, test new solutions and overcome obstacles that individual authorities cannot easily address alone. But what happens when a project ends? Experiences in healthcare, employment, education and tourism offer different perspectives on how Interreg results can influence institutional practice and create opportunities for lasting territorial change.

A cross-border emergency service needs an agreement to operate across national boundaries. A shared labour market calls for coordination between institutions. A new training programme may need recognition and further investment to continue beyond its original funding. And improving access to a neighbouring territory may require changes in administrative procedures as well as infrastructure.

These are different challenges, but they have something in common: developing a solution is only part of the process. Making it work over time often requires institutions to adapt how they organise services, cooperate or make decisions.

This is where Interreg can make a contribution that extends beyond individual project activities. Through territorial cooperation, institutions can identify shared challenges, experiment with solutions, develop working relationships and prepare arrangements that the responsible authorities may subsequently take forward.

Interreg does not necessarily bring about institutional change on its own. Its contribution can lie in creating the solutions, relationships and conditions that make such change possible.

The distinction matters. Projects operate within defined timeframes and resources, while changes in public administration and service delivery often require decisions and commitments that extend well beyond those boundaries.

The four experiences presented at the event illustrate different ways in which cooperation can contribute to this process.

2. Different pathways to lasting change

Experience	Where it stands
Healthcare Interreg POCTEFA (France–Spain)	Initial agreement signed in November 2025, followed by further arrangements between emergency services
Employment Interreg Slovakia–Hungary	Nine Territorial Action Plans for Employment financed in 2014–2020, linking projects through a joint territorial strategy
Education Interreg North Sea Region (INN2POWER)	70 MBA graduates, academic accreditation in 2021 and follow-up through the Erasmus-supported WISE Offshore initiative
Tourism Prespa region, Greece–North Macedonia (BorPres2)	Preparing the reopening of the Laimos–Markova Noga crossing; improved accessibility is still an expected outcome. Project is on going

Table 1: The four experiences at a glance

2.1. Healthcare: from a shared challenge to formal cooperation arrangements

In the Pyrenees, delivering emergency healthcare across the French–Spanish border involves coordinating services that operate under different administrative and institutional arrangements.

The experience presented by Cristina Igoa, from the Working Community of the Pyrenees, focused on cooperation associated with the Cerdanya Cross-Border Hospital and cross-border ambulance services under Interreg POCTEFA. The presentation highlighted an initial agreement signed in November 2025, followed by further arrangements intended to facilitate cooperation between emergency services.

This example illustrates how a practical cross-border need can lead institutions to develop formal cooperation arrangements. Such agreements are an identifiable step towards changing how services work together. Their wider significance will depend on its real implementation.

2.2. Employment: connecting initiatives through territorial action

Employment challenges often extend beyond administrative boundaries. Addressing them can require institutions, businesses and training providers to coordinate their responses rather than act independently.

The Interreg Slovakia–Hungary experience, presented by Silvester Holop, focused on integrated labour-market services and Territorial Action Plans for Employment (TAPEs). Developed for the 2014–2020 programme, TAPE was an integrated territorial instrument intended to support employment and cross-border labour mobility.

Under this approach, stakeholders from both sides of the border developed a joint plan responding to the needs and economic potential of a defined territory. Each plan brought together three to eight complementary or mutually reinforcing projects, including a coordination component. The programme financed nine TAPEs.

Rather than treating employment, skills and local development as separate interventions, the methodology sought to connect them through a common territorial strategy, involving municipalities, SMEs, training institutions and civil society organisations. Its potential contribution therefore lay both in linking investments and in encouraging joint cross-border planning.

Coordinated planning should not be equated with demonstrated territorial transformation. Its significant added value lies in the bottom-up planning process, which provides a framework for more coherent interventions and cooperation.

2.3. Education: building on results beyond the project lifetime

The Interreg North Sea Region's INN2POWER project offers a different perspective: how an initiative developed through cooperation can provide the basis for subsequent activities.

The project supported SMEs working in offshore wind energy and green hydrogen. Among its activities was an Offshore Wind Energy MBA pilot, with 70 participants graduating during the project period. According to the information presented, a company directory also included 1,999 businesses.

These results contributed to subsequent developments, including the Erasmus-supported WISE Offshore initiative. Academic accreditation of the training programme in 2021 was also identified as a factor supporting its recognition and potential continuation.

This example highlights the importance of building on existing results, partnerships and experience. It also suggests that the value of a project may become more apparent over time, particularly when its outputs are taken forward through new initiatives or complementary funding.

At the same time, follow-up activities do not in themselves establish long-term impact. Continued provision, institutional uptake and benefits for learners or businesses are the key steps.

2.4. Tourism: preparing the conditions for improved cross-border mobility

In the Prespa region, between Greece and North Macedonia, the planned reopening of the Laimos–Markova Noga border crossing illustrates how addressing a territorial obstacle can require coordinated administrative, technical and institutional action. The crossing has been inactive since 1967, limiting direct connections between neighbouring communities.

The BorPres2 project aims to improve cross-border accessibility, with a projected reduction in travel time from approximately two hours and fifteen minutes to forty minutes.

Achieving this objective involves more than infrastructure. It also requires preparing border-control arrangements, addressing applicable regulatory requirements and strengthening coordination between the responsible authorities. The approach presented combines technical and environmental preparation, coordination with other financial instruments, cooperation between public institutions, different financing sources and initiatives related to sustainable tourism and mobility.

Improvements in accessibility and tourism are still expected outcomes, since the project is ongoing. Even so, the example clearly shows how Interreg can help bring together the elements required for a complex cross-border initiative.

3. What allows project results to continue?

Across these examples, the relationship between cooperation and lasting change is neither automatic nor linear.

Projects can demonstrate that a solution is technically feasible, generate experience or bring institutions together. Yet continuation may depend on whether public authorities adopt new practices, allocate resources, maintain agreements or incorporate solutions into existing services.

The group discussions held during the event identified obstacles that can complicate this process: differences in administrative and legal frameworks, language barriers, changing political priorities, limited resources and insufficient institutional capacity. Participants also highlighted enabling conditions, including stakeholder involvement, institutional commitment and information exchange, as well as sufficient resources to follow up results and capture institutional change (see chapter 6).

These observations point to a practical question for Interreg programmes:

How can projects anticipate and facilitate the uptake of their results by the institutions that could continue using them?

There is no single answer. The necessary conditions will depend on the nature of the result, the institutions concerned and the territorial context. An operational protocol, a training offer, a territorial action plan and a cross-border infrastructure initiative may each require different arrangements for their continuation.

Importantly, changes should not be judged solely by their formal nature. An operational adjustment that becomes part of routine service delivery may have greater practical significance than a strategy that has not been implemented.

4. Understanding what changes beyond the project

Interreg programmes have well-established mechanisms for recording project activities, outputs and immediate results. Changes in institutional practice, and their contribution to longer-term territorial change, are more difficult to capture.

The number of people trained, agreements signed or joint strategies developed shows what cooperation has produced. It does not necessarily reveal what has changed as a consequence. An agreement may formalise cooperation without yet improving service delivery. A training programme may reach participants without becoming part of a sustained education offer. A joint strategy may identify shared priorities without influencing subsequent public decisions.

Understanding territorial added value therefore requires looking beyond the existence of project results to their subsequent use:

- Has a procedure been adopted by the responsible authorities?
- Is a service or training offer still being delivered?
- Have institutions changed the way they coordinate their activities?
- Are those changes improving conditions for the people or territories concerned?

These questions help distinguish between three stages:

Stage	Key question
1. Developing a solution	What has cooperation produced?
2. Adopting it in practice	Who has adopted the solution and what has changed in institutional practice?
3. Demonstrating longer-term effects	Is the change maintained, and what difference does it make for territories and their people?

Table 2: From solution to lasting change

Not all projects will progress through these stages in the same way or within the same timeframe. Some results may require additional investment, institutional decisions or complementary initiatives before their wider relevance becomes evident, and institutional uptake may depend on processes that extend well beyond a project's implementation period.

The absence of immediate territorial effects therefore does not necessarily mean that cooperation has been unsuccessful. It may indicate that the conditions for further uptake are still being developed.

Nevertheless, potential change should not be confused with demonstrated impact.

5. Connecting funds and results for a realistic impact

5.1. Capitalisation: connecting results for uptake

These considerations give capitalisation and transfer a particularly relevant role, provided capitalisation goes beyond collecting good practices, sharing experience or increasing the visibility of project results.

Capitalisation can also connect solutions developed through cooperation with the institutions capable of taking them forward. This may involve:

- identifying results with potential for wider application;
- connecting project partners with public authorities;
- facilitating exchanges between territories facing comparable challenges;
- exploring how existing solutions could be adapted and financed through other mechanisms.

The four experiences show different forms of continuity. INN2POWER illustrates how subsequent initiatives and complementary funding can build on an earlier project. The healthcare example points to the role of formal agreements, the tourism case to institutional arrangements and coordination, and territorial employment planning to the potential of coordinated approaches. In each case, the opportunity lies in moving from a project-based solution towards its possible integration into a broader institutional or territorial process.

These are different forms of continuity, not a single model to be replicated. Transfer should not be confused with replication: a solution that works in one territory may require adaptation to different administrative, legal or institutional circumstances elsewhere. Successful transfer depends on understanding the circumstances in which a solution was developed and the changes needed for its use in another setting.

For programmes, this suggests that supporting uptake may require as much attention to institutional relationships and practical implementation conditions as to the technical qualities of a project result.

5.2. Coordination and synergies: ensuring impact in the territory

Participants stressed that coordination with other funds and programmes is key to achieving real impact in the territory. Interreg often acts as a trigger by developing the solution, while its adoption and final impact are usually financed by other funds and structures.

Taking this into account is essential for a realistic view of impact: **Interreg's impact is not isolated, but part of a wider strategic whole.**

6. Workshop conclusions: what the working tables showed

The working tables explored how Interreg projects can contribute to territorial reform. Participants identified changes in cross-border practice, considered how far institutions had adopted them and discussed what would help promising results last.

6.1. Change in practice

What are partners doing differently? Table 1 described a functioning Estonia–Latvia pilot for exchanging radiology data and pilot protocols for responding to wildfires. In a separate Slovakia–Hungary example, Table 2 described cross-border teleradiology as sustained. Participants therefore identified both practices under test and a service they considered established.

6.2. Reform potential

Could the tested approach become part of how the responsible institutions deliver a service? For the radiology data pilot, the next step would be to identify which healthcare providers could make the exchange routine, who can authorise it and who can fund continued use.

Reform can take the form of a lasting change in administrative practice, service delivery, governance or rules.

6.3. Territorial transformation

What lasting difference does the practice make for people or places? If providers adopt cross-border data exchange, a programme could ask whether patients gain easier access to diagnosis. The working table recorded the pilot; its effect on access remains a question for follow-up. The type of change and its maturity answer different questions. An operational improvement used routinely may matter more to residents than a strategy awaiting implementation.

6.4. Conditions for uptake

Participants identified the following enablers and barriers to adoption. One table also proposed budgeting for capitalisation within projects.

Conditions	What participants identified
Enablers	Trust, local engagement and information exchange
Barriers	Language differences, lack of administrative and financial resources, legislation, administrative procedures, funding gaps and changes in political support

7. Recommendations for programmes

The recommendations in this section draw on the working-table discussions and on the maturity assessments recorded by the three tables.

7.1. What participants proposed

Table 1 proposed building on successful project results, strengthening the capacity of public authorities and budgeting for synergy and capitalisation activities. Table 3 called for greater awareness and information sharing across programmes and strands. These proposals give programmes a basis for supporting continued use.

7.2. Suggested actions across the project cycle

The following six actions translate the workshop discussion into options for programme teams.

Action	What programmes can do
1. Combine funds and calls	Explore complementarity with other funds and calls where a project result needs further support for adoption or wider use. Discuss with the other funding body which need each call could address and whether their timing would allow institutions to act.
2. Identify the adopter	Ask who could adopt the result and what would change in that institution's routine work. Identify who can authorise the decision, including any agreement or allocation of resources it requires.
3. Resource the transfer	Provide time and resources for partners to adapt the result, train users and support transfer. Ask the intended user what support it needs to take responsibility for continued use.
4. Tackle obstacles early	Use progress reviews to identify obstacles with partners. Involve the authorities that can resolve them and record the next decision needed on each side of the border.
5. Connect with new users	Connect partners with potential users in territories facing a similar need. Agree what can be reused, what needs adapting and who can support the receiving institution.
6. Follow adoption	Record who uses the result and how far adoption has progressed. Where feasible, revisit selected results after closure and ask users what has changed for them. The prompts in section 7.3 can guide that discussion.

7.3. A simple way to document change

Programme teams can use the following prompts in existing project conversations and reports.

Please note: this is a proposed follow-up tool, not a workshop-agreed indicator system.

Prompt	What to record
What result is being used?	Identify the specific protocol, method, service, curriculum or cooperation arrangement. Avoid describing the whole project.
Who uses it and what changes?	Name the adopting organisation and explain the change in its routine work, procedures or decisions.
How far has adoption progressed?	Use the exercise categories: **pilot or potential**, **being adopted**, **embedded or sustained**, or **unknown**. Record the date and the basis for the assessment.
What supports the description?	Request proportionate evidence, for example an approved procedure, institutional confirmation of routine use, an agreement, or resources committed to continuation. A document's existence alone does not establish implementation.
Who benefits and what remains to be done?	Describe the intended or observed benefit for people or territories. Distinguish observed improvements from expected benefits, and record any unresolved condition for continued use.

8. Conclusion: making cooperation's contribution visible

The four experiences illustrate the potential of Interreg to support changes that extend beyond individual projects. They also highlight the importance of being precise about what has actually been achieved: some concern formal agreements, others project outputs and subsequent initiatives, while others focus on preparing changes that have yet to be fully implemented.

Taken together, they do not prove that cooperation always produces lasting territorial effects. They do, however, illustrate several mechanisms through which Interreg can contribute to change. Interreg can provide a space for experimentation, help institutions work across borders and generate solutions to problems that individual authorities may struggle to address alone. But the continuation of those solutions depends on decisions, resources and institutional processes that often extend beyond the projects themselves.

Recognising this does not diminish Interreg's contribution. It helps explain more precisely where that contribution lies, without attributing to projects changes that depend on wider institutional decisions.

Looking ahead to the post-2027 period, programmes can strengthen their ability to identify promising results, support their adoption by competent institutions and document the changes that follow. They can also distinguish between solutions that have been developed, those that are being adopted and those that have become part of sustained institutional practice.

Interreg does not need to be the direct author of a reform to contribute meaningfully to reforming a territory. Its added value lies in making change possible, by creating the solutions, relationships and conditions through which institutions can act.

Ultimately, the question is not simply what cooperation delivers during a project, but what institutions are able to adopt, maintain and build upon afterwards. The challenge is to ensure that what cooperation makes possible can become what territories are able to sustain.