Interact

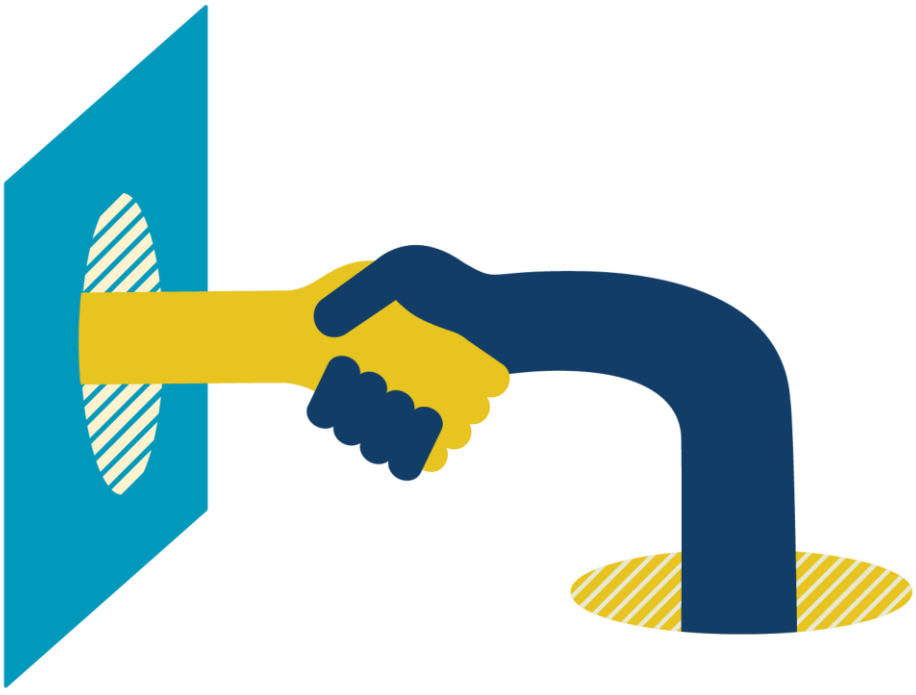
Co-funded by the European Union
Interreg

Clarification Fiche

Interreg Specific Objective 3 More Resilient Regions Bordering Russia and Belarus

November 2026

The objective of this clarification fiche is to support Interreg chapters in understanding the rationale, scope and practical application of the proposed Interreg specific objective 3 (*More resilient regions bordering Russia, Belarus or Ukraine)* during the preparation of future chapters.



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 If you spot a something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

Copyright: This product is licensed under Creative Commons, under the 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International' license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

You are permitted to share and adapt this work. You are required to attribute the work, indicating if changes were made. You are required to offer revised work on the same license basis. The material cannot be used for commercial purposes.

For more information about this license please visit creativecommons.org



Publisher Interact Programme
Date 18.11.2026
Author: Marko Ruokangas, Ilze Ciganska

Interact

Co-funded by the European Union
Interreg

Table of contents

1. Purpose and context 3
   1.1. Policy context 3
   1.2. Why a dedicated Interreg-specific objective? 4
2. How to design ISO3 for your chapter? 5
3. Strategic coordination and synergies – working beyond individual chapters 10
   3.1. Cooperation between Interreg chapters through Baltic Sea network 10
   3.2. Look beyond the chapter geography 10
   3.3. Thematic mapping of Interreg and NRPP priorities 10
   3.4. Regular exchanges and visibility 11

1. Purpose and context

A new Interreg Specific Objective 3 (ISO3), More resilient regions bordering Russia, Belarus or Ukraine, has been introduced in the Commission's legislative proposals for the 2028–2034 programming period. This new objective responds to the fundamentally changed geopolitical situation along the European Union's eastern external borders.

This fiche aims to support the preparation of future Interreg chapters by clarifying the rationale, scope and practical application of ISO3. It explains how Interreg cooperation can contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the Communication on the EU's Eastern Regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine (hereafter referred to as *the Communication*) and outlines practical considerations for chapter design.

The fiche is intended as a supporting reference document. It does not prescribe specific approaches to chapter design or implementation, nor does it constitute a legal interpretation of the future regulations.

The fiche focuses specifically on the application of ISO3 to Interreg chapters covering regions bordering Russia and Belarus. It is intended as a guidance document and does not constitute a legal interpretation of the future regulations.

1.1. Policy context

The Communication recognises that the European Union's eastern border regions have entered a fundamentally different operating environment.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has transformed the geopolitical context of these regions. Traditional economic relations have been disrupted, borders have been closed, security concerns have increased, demographic pressures have intensified and many regions face declining investment attractiveness. At the same time, these regions have become strategically important for the resilience, security and competitiveness of the European Union as a whole.

The Communication therefore calls for a coordinated European response built around five mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. Security and resilience - to protect, deter and reassure
2. Growth and regional prosperity - fostering access to financing, innovation, technology and SME development
3. Building on local strengths – bioeconomy, energy, environment, agriculture and skills
4. Connectivity - to connect people and support growth
5. People - regions are as strong as the communities living there

These areas should not be understood as separate thematic sectors but as complementary dimensions of regional resilience. The proposed draft regulation establishing the European Fund for Regional Development including for European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) translates this political ambition into a dedicated Interreg-specific objective on “More Resilient Regions bordering Russia, Belarus or Ukraine” (ISO3), recognising that cooperation has an essential role alongside national and regional investment programmes.

1.2. Why a dedicated Interreg-specific objective?

The introduction of ISO3 recognises the specific geopolitical, economic, territorial and societal challenges facing eastern border regions and the need for coordinated responses across sectors and administrative borders. As a new Interreg Specific Objective, ISO3 provides a dedicated framework for cooperation that allows these interconnected challenges to be addressed in a more integrated and territorially focused manner.

The flexible scope of ISO3 and geographical coverage allow chapters to adapt and redirect cooperation in response to evolving regional needs and priorities, including in areas such as security, energy, migration and economic diversification.

Within the context of ISO3, resilience may be understood as the capacity of eastern border regions to anticipate, withstand, adapt to and recover from external shocks while maintaining their long-term economic vitality, social cohesion, territorial attractiveness and institutional capacity.

2. How to design ISO3 for your chapter?

Programming process generally starts from the needs analysis identifying and addressing the territorial needs and gaps. This analysis provides a basis for identifying the challenges that could be addressed through cooperation and considering where cooperation can bring added value. The following guiding questions may be useful when exploring potential measures:

- What are the most pressing challenges/needs in the area?
- Which of these needs require cooperation?
- What change is realistically achievable through cooperation?
- Who needs to be involved to deliver it?
- What type of cooperation activities are required?
- How will progress and achievement be demonstrated through milestones and targets?

The next step in the programming process involves translating the outcomes of your analysis into measures. For each measure, chapters must indicate the primary and, where applicable, secondary specific objective supported, explain how the measure contributes to these objectives and specify its total estimated cost. Chapters also set out milestones and targets to track the achievement of each measure, together with their associated payout values.

If a measure is designed predominantly to strengthen the resilience of the eastern border regions, ISO3 would be the relevant primary specific objective. Where a measure has a broader scope and primarily pursues another objective, ISO3 may be identified as a secondary specific objective if the measure is also expected to contribute to the resilience of the eastern border regions, either through wider spill-over effects or through specific activities targeting these regions.

ISO3 as a cross-cutting contribution of the chapter

The resilience challenges addressed by ISO3 often extend across several thematic areas. Chapters may therefore consider the contribution to ISO3 not only through measures for which it is the primary specific objective, but also across the chapter as a whole.

Identifying ISO3 as a secondary specific objective provides a practical means to this end. Measures primarily pursuing another specific objective, for example on innovation, climate adaptation or governance, may indicate ISO3 as a secondary specific objective where they are expected to contribute to the resilience of the eastern border regions. This makes the chapter's contribution to ISO3 visible across its measures and supports an overall view of its contribution to the objectives of the Communication.

The financial allocation of a measure is attributed to its primary specific objective. The identification of ISO3 as a secondary specific objective does not change that allocation. It

should be supported by an explanation of the expected contribution and, where relevant, reflected in specific activities or calls targeting the eastern border regions, or in the description of milestones and targets.

Other approaches may also support a cross-cutting contribution to ISO3, such as selection criteria that take into account contribution to eastern border regions.

Additional considerations while designing measures

Designing measures will entail balancing specificity and breadth.

- Specificity:
    - This means a focus on specific challenges against which the chapter can realistically deliver tangible and measurable change;
    - And that measures are composed of actions for which there is existing historical data or comparable market data, or other data to justify the costing as advised in the Commission Guidance.

- Breadth
    - This means that, generally, measures are broad enough to be delivered through a combination of more than one project;

And measures are not overly prescriptive, enabling flexibility and innovation during implementation.

You can find more information and an overview of the building blocks of the 2028-34 intervention logic - including specific objectives, intervention fields, output and result indicators – on the performance-based approaches page on Interact's website.

Illustrative examples of possible measures

The examples below are intended to illustrate the potential logic of chapter measures under ISO3 rather than prescribe specific interventions. The formulation and level of detail of individual measures will depend on the needs and circumstances of each chapter area. In particular, the examples may be more detailed than necessary for chapter design and should not be regarded as a benchmark for the level of granularity expected.

1. *Security and resilience – to protect, deter and reassure*

Resilience challenge	Illustrative measure	Possible actions
Limited crisis preparedness	Strengthening institutional preparedness and joint crisis response capacities	Joint preparedness planning, cross-border exercises, common risk assessment methodologies, capacity building for authorities
Increasing hybrid and information threats	Building societal and institutional resilience against hybrid and information threats	Cooperation on strategic communication, media literacy, counter-disinformation networks, knowledge exchange

2. *Growth and regional prosperity – fostering access to financing, innovation, technology and SME development*

Resilience challenge	Illustrative measure	Possible actions
Economic restructuring following changing geopolitical conditions	Supporting economic adaptation and diversification of the border regions	SME cooperation networks, innovation partnerships, business support pilots, joint skills initiatives
Declining attractiveness of border regions	Strengthening territorial attractiveness and community resilience of the border regions	Joint strategies for talent attraction and retention, youth initiatives, place-based innovation, community engagement
Limited access to finance and fragmented innovation ecosystems	Strengthening cross-border innovation and investment readiness in border regions.	Cross-border innovation partnerships and technology transfer; capacity-building for municipalities and SMEs on accessing EU and national financing instruments; exchange of good practice on investment project preparation and early-stage advisory support

3. *Building on local strengths – bioeconomy, energy, environment, agriculture and skills*

Resilience challenge	Illustrative measure	Possible actions
Challenges and shortages of energy supply	Reducing dependency on external energy suppliers	Community owned renewable energy projects, cross-border energy cooperatives

Challenges and shortages on food supply	Establishing cross-border support mechanisms for agri-tech & short food supply chains	Vertical agriculture, direct-to-consumer platforms, precision farming
Shrinking working-age population and loss of skilled workers to outmigration driven by security concerns	Sustaining essential local services and institutional capacity as the workforce shrinks	Joint administrative or legal agreements allowing emergency, medical or municipal services to operate across the border, digital service development
Loss of tourism flows	Sustaining the viability of tourism-dependent businesses and cross-border tourism infrastructure	Cross-border business diversification pilots for tourism operators; repurposing tourism infrastructure for new uses; joint cross-border peer exchange on adapting business models

4. *Connectivity – to connect people and support growth*

Resilience challenge	Illustrative measure	Possible actions
Traditional cooperation networks and connections cut due to the war and closed borders	Support to diversify connections and find partners and new cooperation opportunities	Partner-search and matchmaking events connecting authorities and organisations from affected chapters with potential new partners; joint thematic networks or platforms
Limited and narrowed digital connectivity – gaps in broadband coverage, slow internet speed, limited digital public service delivery	Strengthening cross-border digital connectivity and service delivery	Joint mapping of connectivity gaps; small cross-border digital public service pilots for sparsely populated areas; joint digital skills training

5. *People – regions are as strong as the communities living there*

Resilience challenge	Illustrative measure	Possible actions
Population traumatized / affected by conflict	Building services and support mechanisms on psychological resilience	Joint telemedicine or mobile mental health service pilots; training for local support workers; joint helpline or peer-support networks
Disinformation affecting the population	Improving awareness to recognize and filter disinformation	Networks/platforms, sensibilization of schools and universities and journalists on

		cross-border issues, trainings for local leaders
Weak institutional coordination	Improving governance and cooperation capacity	Joint governance models, policy learning, peer reviews, common planning methodologies
Demographic decline and declining territorial attractiveness	Sustaining community functionality and resilience.	Solutions for cross-border service-sharing; cross-border civic and cultural initiatives.

3. Strategic coordination and synergies – working beyond individual chapters

ISO3 is intended to contribute to a wider territorial response to the resilience challenges facing the EU's eastern border regions. Many of these challenges extend beyond individual chapter geographies and may be difficult to address effectively through isolated actions. Coordination across chapters and with other relevant instruments can therefore play an important role, both during chapter preparation and throughout implementation.

In this context, Interreg chapters may benefit from exploring opportunities for cooperation with other chapters and coordination with other funding instruments to enhance the reach and impact of planned measures.

3.1. Cooperation between Interreg chapters through Baltic Sea network

The Network of Interreg programmes in the Baltic Sea Region, facilitated by Interact, provides a platform for regular exchanges among relevant Interreg chapters on their planned ISO3 measures and approaches. These exchanges can help chapters identify common challenges, share experiences and expertise, and explore opportunities for cooperation that could bring added value.

Cooperation may take different forms, depending on the needs identified, ranging from information exchange and peer learning to the transfer of solutions and more coordinated thematic actions. The aim is to strengthen the overall contribution of Interreg to eastern border resilience and communication while respecting the specific needs and priorities of each chapter.

3.2. Look beyond the chapter geography

In addition to cooperation between chapters, individual ISO3 measures may benefit from the involvement of organisations and expertise from outside the chapter area. This may be particularly relevant where specialised knowledge, experience or partnerships available in other eastern border regions could contribute to addressing the challenges identified.

Depending on the nature of the measure, this could take the form of dedicated activities or calls allowing organisations from outside the chapter area to participate where their involvement brings clear added value. Such involvement would not imply an extension of the chapter's geographical coverage but rather provide opportunities to draw on relevant expertise and partnerships in support of its objectives.

3.3. Thematic mapping of Interreg and NRPP priorities

To support closer coordination between Interreg chapters and the authorities responsible for National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs), Interact will carry out a thematic mapping exercise. The aim is to provide a common overview of emerging priorities and planned measures, helping identify potential synergies, complementarities and opportunities for cooperation in addressing the resilience challenges facing the EU's eastern border regions. It will also help

identify potential gaps and ensure that the complementary strengths of both funding instruments are used to best effect.

The exercise will start with the Interreg chapters' emerging priorities and measures and will subsequently be complemented with information on NRPP preparations. It will be updated regularly throughout the preparation of chapters, providing a common reference for identifying:

- shared territorial challenges and emerging thematic priorities;
- planned interventions under Interreg and NRPPs;
- potential gaps, overlaps and complementarities between the funding instruments; and
- opportunities for Interreg cooperation to prepare, accompany or connect wider investments.

The mapping is intended to be a practical and evolving exercise, supporting making necessary decisions as measures become clearer. It aims to help identify where coordination can make a tangible difference, rather than create an additional administrative process.

3.4. Regular exchanges and visibility

Regular exchanges are organised between relevant Interreg chapters and NRPP authorities to review developments, update the thematic mapping and discuss opportunities for stronger coordination. These exchanges will build on existing networks and structures and will be organised in a proportionate manner, with the aim of keeping the process practical and focused on results.

Through these three elements, coordination will be maintained throughout programming, helping Interreg chapters and NRPP authorities identify complementarities early and strengthen the collective contribution of EU funding to the objectives of the Communication on the EU's eastern border regions.