

Interreg in a more social Europe

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

Overview

This session gathered around 22 Interreg specialists who have launched (or are planning to launch) any call under Policy Objective 4 within their programmes.

The objectives were to highlight Interreg's added value for a 'More social Europe' until now, identify practices and challenges that programmes face when working on social projects, and identify clear solutions from a regulatory or implementing approach. The session counted on the active participation of Esteller Roger and Olivier Baudelet (DG REGIO), who shared some reflections on the EU Social Policy. Also, they set the links with the European Social Fund (ESF) and other funds related to social policies.

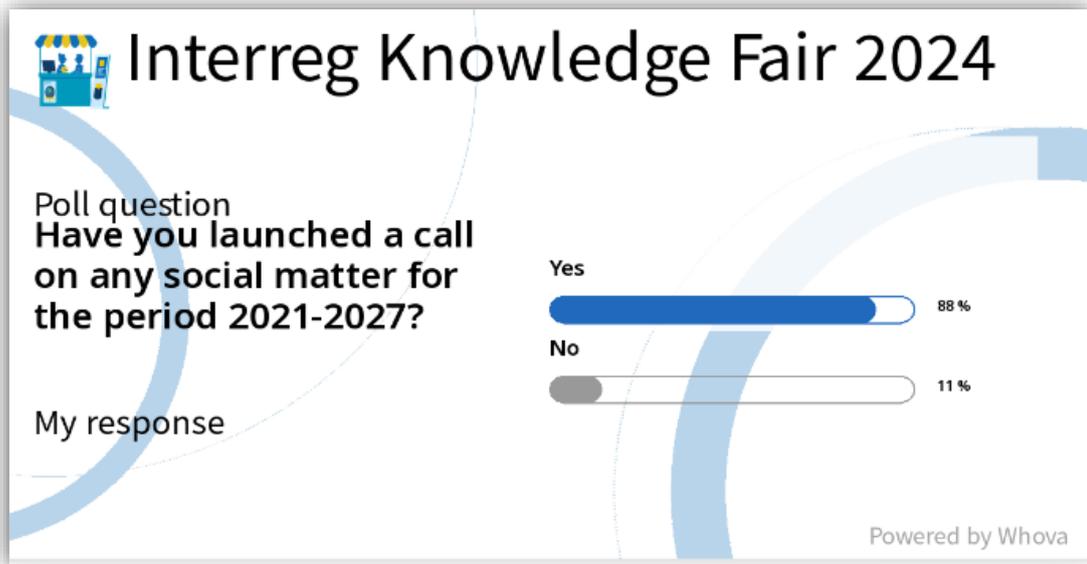
Methodology

The session was structured in the following blocks:

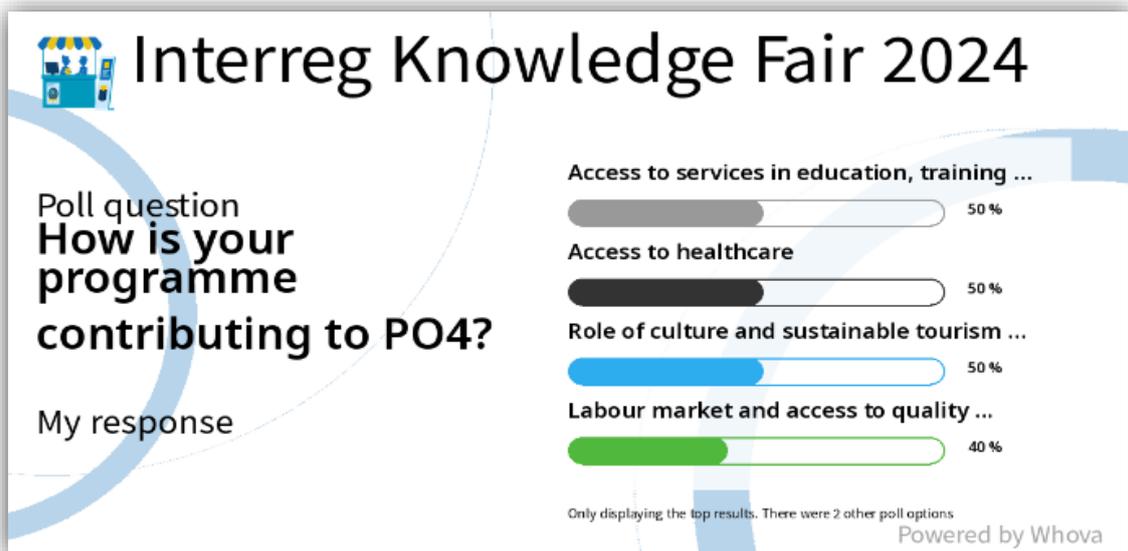
1. **Presentation of Interreg's contribution to 'A more social Europe'**. Here, the focus was placed on the challenges of 2014-2020.
2. **State of play: budget, calls and implementation**. Quick reflection on the current period (actions and challenges).
3. **Reflections on the social policy in Europe**, including the social policy post 27.
4. **Time to discuss**. In groups, participants discussed key issues such as the types of interventions they are financing in PO4 and the aspects that should be improved or changed in the future.

Before the event, some questions were asked in Whova to set the ground and better understand the current role of programmes as regards social topics:

- Have you launched a call on social matters?



- How is your programme contributing to PO4?



Key discussion points

The discussions started with a brief recollection of actions taken in the past (2024-2020) and soon shifted towards the present (current challenges found and achievements made) and the future, with the question 'What can be improved or changed for post-27?' The latter was significant when trying to determine where the EU social dimension is going.

Conclusions

These are the main points raised among the various groups:

- Interreg stands out as an essential tool for a fairer and more inclusive Europe now and in the future; “geography of discontent/not leaving anyone behind” were themes raised in the group.
- Some opinions mentioned that such a social dimension for Interreg could be considered a horizontal principle in the regulations, contributing to the EU Social Pillar.
- The focus for PO4 should be on specific social themes (skills, labour market, healthcare, inclusion) rather than the recovery of the tourism sector. Tourism is perceived as a separate topic. It should be horizontal to innovation, environment, and economy.
- Good solutions for Interreg social projects are already in place, such as using CLLD (bottom-up approach) and Territorial Action Plans. Still, these are not for all topics, such as tourism.
- PO 4 for external borders programmes. Although these are very popular, they should be adapted to their specificity.
- Both ISO1 and PO4 tackle cross-border obstacles in social topics.

Moreover, participants stated the following needs:

- New beneficiaries involving youth and social agents. Also, NGOs but here there is a problem of financial stability.
- Direct financing support is needed for final recipients.
- Enhance the combination of ERDF and ESF+, avoiding overlaps between Interreg actions and ESF+ in the same area.
- Interreg PO4 projects are often too theoretical compared with ESF+. However, they can help create a bridge between the legal problem at the local level and the relevant national or regional authority competent for the matter.
- Adjustments for PO4 to be more attractive to transnational programmes specifically focusing on demographic changes.

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