

# Future of Interact: Tools to make cooperation easier in Post 2027

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

## Overview

Over 40 Interreg specialists convened to discuss on Interact post 2027, exploring how Interact could support the forthcoming wave of programmes.

During the session, participants expressed their strong interest in leveraging Interact's support going forward, emphasizing the great opportunities for experience exchange, knowledge sharing, networking, and its pivotal role as a bridge between programmes and the Commission, all of which greatly enrich the Interreg community. They offered insights into enhancing Interact's assistance by broadening its geographical and thematic coverage, embracing emerging technologies like AI, further tailoring support to meet the diverse needs of programmes, focusing on harmonisation and simplification, and enhancing flexibility.

The session was an integral component of Interact's own consultation regarding its future direction. The dialogue on Interact post 2027 will persist throughout 2024, ensuring ongoing improvements and adaptation to meet evolving programmes' needs.

## Methodology

In early February a survey on first reflections on Interreg Post 2027 was distributed to programmes, including two specific questions on Interact's future aiming to identify what programmes value the most about Interact services and collect their suggestions for significant innovations, inspiration or changes that a future Interact programme could introduce to make cooperation easier. In total 26 responses were received.

The survey results were used to inform the topics for discussion and presented broadly during the meeting.

The discussion in the room was structured around following topics:

- 1) **General** – what to keep/change in the future;
- 2) **Methods** of delivering Interact services;
- 3) Enriching **exchange** between programmes;
- 4) Future of **harmonisation and simplification**.

During the session participants were divided into four groups and invited to reflect on dedicated topics as well as to contribute to other groups randomly, based on their own interest, reflecting on:

- What is working?
- What requires repairing / improvements?
- What is missing?
- What would be your vision for the future?

## Key discussion points

### *General – what to keep/change in the future*

The participants expressed the **need for further Interact support and assistance to programmes**, praising the variety of topics covered with Interact services and tools, as well as its prompt reactions to emerging programmes' needs.

They value, in particular, **Interact events** which provide great opportunities for experience exchange, knowledge sharing and networking (live/online/hybrid format), as well as **geographically and thematically focused discussions and networks**. They also find the Interact tools (Interact Academy, Joint Electronic Monitoring System (Jems), Index, Keep), **Interact exchange platform** and its **publications, factsheets, booklets** very useful and informative.

Participants specifically pointed to the need to **expand the Interact services and tools** to tackle project level and diverse programmes needs, as well as **to broaden the target groups** to include stakeholders inside and outside the Interreg community. They also suggested to put its **focus on enlargement** and to serve as **a bridge between the EC and external programmes** in the future, indicating the necessity of increasing the Interact budget for the next programming period. Furthermore, they advised Interact to pay more attention to its own **visibility**, and to better promote the programme on social media and elsewhere.

They also recommended to **involve IVY** in Interact's future activities, **synchronise better the event calendar with the EC, revive some networks** (e.g. network gathering project officers), organise a **fair of good practices** (presenting unusual solutions).

### *Methods of delivering Interact services*

The participants praised various methods of delivering Interact services suggesting the following for the future:

- **Interact Academy:** certified trainings to be organised more often, avoiding large time gaps; to expand target groups (e.g. audit and paying authorities) and topics (e.g. capitalisation).
- **Interreg Knowledge Fair:** parallel sessions with different topic streams to be organised in parallel, enabling participants to choose what to attend based on preferences; to define a broad spectrum of topics based on what is needed, consulting as many programmes in advance.
- **Interact exchange platform:** consider incorporating the use of AI, expand communities to include other topics.

- **Introduce a contact point for programmes** (Interact person covering several similar programmes), keep both formats (i.e. online and in person) for event delivery and **surveys** as preferred method of collecting feedback from programmes;

The participants also pointed out the **Interact website** as a valuable resource for factsheets, documents and templates. They proposed creating **podcasts** based on experiences of programmes and their lessons learned to reach more people. The participants also suggested **making Interact more visible in the future** (e.g. EC day events, country specific events).

The participants stressed that they encountered some challenges in using Interact tools to their full potential, suggesting Interact to organise/coordinate events to promote harmonisation, assisting with trouble shooting issues with relevant bodies and enabling authorities and bodies to share ideas and practices (e.g. on Jems).

#### *Enriching exchange between programmes*

The participants highlighted the **events** organised by Interact as particularly important in facilitating exchange between programmes, networking and meeting people, praising also the **exchange platform, thematic support**, as well as **regional and strand focus** in delivering services.

To enrich exchange between the programmes in the future, the participants suggested the programme **to identify/create new opportunities in a systematic way**, avoiding dependence on individual ideas or sparks, **to further improve the exchange platform**, taking into account public sector technology challenges (needs to be properly signposted and easy to navigate, tight to topics and actively managed), and to provide more **support for onboarding new people**. Leveraging regional, strand, thematic, and specialised dimensions was proposed **to help navigation and connection between people working on the same thing or in the same place**. They also expressed the **need for thematic networks**, which they consider valuable yet lacking.

#### *Future of harmonisation and simplification*

The participants highlighted that it was crucial **to sustain current efforts and momentum in simplification and harmonisation initiatives** (e.g. application of SCOs), and to **ensure continued sharing of best practices** to foster learning across programmes. Furthermore, they suggested seeking inspiration from external programmes, financial instruments, and international practices for **innovative simplification ideas**.

The importance of **embedding** in the project development and selection phases was also underlined. The Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT) should be retained and further developed where possible.

The participants also suggested **to maintain the optional use of simplified and harmonised tools in the future**, while providing clear guidelines when their use is obligatory. Efforts should be made **to identify and share new channels for involving partners beyond the programme area to enrich collaboration** in the post 2027 period.

Finally, regarding the future **monitoring system**, it was suggested **to maintain voluntary usage** with consideration for new plugins or functionalities and **integration with other tools** (e.g.

KOHESIO). However, some respondents in the survey proposed that Jems should be mandatory for programmes.

### **Regulations and articles of particular significance**

ERDF Regulation	13 (7)
Interreg Regulation	3c, 15, 17

### **Conclusions, plans for follow up**

The meeting gave an overview of opinions shared on these issues.

The key ideas expressed around all topics were presented to the Interact Coordination Board immediately after the session conclusion. The outcomes will be also presented and discussed in the MC meeting in Valencia, in June. The consultation with key stakeholders will continue during 2024 (events, meetings), and the results will be provided to the EC by the end of the year.

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