

Post 2027 | Consultation Report

3a. Maritime cooperation

14 January 2025

The maritime dimension of Interreg

This subject specific report is an annex to the territorial instruments report (Interreg and the future of territorial instruments), and is part of Interact's [Post 2027 Consultation reports](#)

Overview

Interreg includes both programmes that are fully located in a maritime area and other programmes that include maritime areas and, as such, promote specific marine and maritime activities, such as targeted calls. Interreg programmes engage with the maritime dimension by aligning with Sea Basin Strategies, the Blue Economy pillars of Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS), and European and international legislation. While not all Interreg programmes cover maritime cooperation explicitly in their core activities, those that do have demonstrated that they can use cooperation and coordination to support the implementation of key directives like the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Maritime Spatial Planning Directives.

Methodology

Interact conducted a survey of Interreg programmes to assess their maritime approaches, using a questionnaire developed with input from the Committee of the Regions and DG Regio. The findings were incorporated into the 'Additional Elements' discussion paper presented at the Harvesting Event. Based on the ensuing discussions, the key messages were refined to better reflect the shared perspectives of programmes with maritime dimensions or a maritime focus.

What is working

Interreg helps to drive economic growth through maritime cooperation

Interreg programmes support economic development through maritime cooperation by promoting blue economy projects, enhancing skills training, and fostering innovation across marine and maritime industries. Such initiatives include marine monitoring and data collection, joint research in blue economy sectors, digital solutions for coastal tourism, renewable energy investments, and cross-border

collaborations on environmental conservation and marine spatial planning. Specific projects such as developing guest harbours, reducing sea pollution, and sustainable tourism in maritime regions further highlight Interreg's role in strengthening the economic potential of coastal and maritime communities.

Increasingly vital in today's challenging environment, Interreg programmes also use cooperation to contribute to pressing and urgent questions of maritime crisis management and safety.

What needs improving

To enhance maritime cooperation and address border obstacles, Interreg should better recognise the maritime dimension across cross-border and transnational programmes, balancing focus on both coastal (NUTS III) and land-sea (NUTS II) interactions. Treating the sea as an equal border to land and integrating blue policies alongside green strategies is essential. Increased political awareness and stakeholder involvement in maritime policy are needed, along with greater visibility of maritime boundaries on Interreg platforms and improved regulatory awareness. Flexibility in programming, better governance, understanding of different cross-border maritime competencies, removal of legal barriers, and support for smaller organizations can help maximize cooperation potential and address unique maritime challenges.

Key messages for the future of maritime cooperation in Interreg

1. There are approximately 491 coastal regions in the EU28¹. For the population living in those regions, the sea serves as a connecting border, comparable to land borders but with distinct challenges. This highlights the importance of fostering seamless cooperation among regions that share a maritime space.
2. Maritime cooperation in sea basins is essential, as the only tool that allows diverse territories to work together on complex transboundary issues.
3. The maritime space involves complex interactions across natural and human dimensions, requiring tailored approaches to governance and collaboration that foster shared responsibility.
4. Interreg has consolidated and demonstrated experience in place-based implementation of maritime initiatives. It engages citizens in maritime border regions, including islands, addressing their specific challenges and creating socio-economic and environmental opportunities.
5. Interreg has consolidated and demonstrated experience supporting the practical implementation of fundamental maritime legislation through cooperation.

¹ 491 NUTS 2016 level 3 coastal regions in the EU28. Of these, 396 regions have a coastline, 95 regions have no coastline but more than 50 % of their population living within 50 km of the sea. For all EU Member States, Iceland, Norway, Montenegro, Albania and Turkey, a list of coastal regions is available here. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Territorial_typologies_manual_-_coastal_regions

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

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