

Interreg for a Greener Europe

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

Overview

The Greener Europe Policy Objective (PO2) is mandatory for all Interreg programmes in 21-27 and backed by significant financial resources. How should Interreg programmes work together to ensure an effective response to this fundamental issue? How can Interreg programmes manage its effects? What is next for Europe to be truly Greener? What is the Interreg's clear role and mandate to ensure this happens within a dense regulatory framework and alongside a series of other EU supported funding mechanisms dealing with the Green topic? Interact's Greener Europe Thematic Network launched during the session will be the go to place for Interreg programmes exchanges on the topic.

Session Summary

This session discussed the role Interreg programmes play within the co-existence of other EU supported mechanisms aiming at addressing climate change. The session also helped programmes to identify ways forward to ensure its approach is recognized as unique and needed when supporting the EU to achieve its ambitious climate related targets in a Post-27 context.

In order to set the scene for the programmes and foster the discussion, Interact presented an overview of the EU Green Deal elements and also provided examples of current funding schemes which also touch upon or overlaps Interreg's geographical and thematic areas.

The consensus was around Interreg's added value when addressing climate change, through its special territorial dimension, integrated approach, with at its heart the needs of citizens and local communities.

Key discussion points

Through group discussions supported by directed questions moderated by Interact the group reached the following conclusions:

Interreg's Role under the framework of EU's climate change funding mechanisms

- Within the co-existence of numerous EU-supported mechanisms aiming at addressing climate change, Interreg stands out as the true supporter/enabler of territories and citizens.
- Territorial dimension highlighted. Interreg knows the common needs of border areas, strong position when tackling the geographical element of a border and address common nature challenges.

- Can play a key role in piloting and testing climate related solutions.
- Can play a key role through the capitalization of project results, in particular with other EU funding mechanisms (e.g. larger infrastructure and innovation related funds).

Importance of Interreg's Territorial Dimension and its priority sectors

- Topics covered as part of PO2 naturally call for an integrated approach, as many overlaps/bridges across POs, and SOs within PO2.
- Climate resilience and environment can only be tackled as a whole, considering all factors on territories.
- Priority sectors confirmed: integrated approach to energy, water, sustainable construction, electricity supply, sustainable tourism, circular economy, agriculture, aquaculture.
- Geographical approach - as many funding opportunities exist for cities, they should be developed further within Interreg. In the meantime, Interreg has a potential and responsibility to support all territories in their diversity and specificity, e.g. islands, sea and coastal areas across borders, rural areas, small municipalities.
- Prominent target groups to focus on include civil society and NGOs as the catalyst/ultimate beneficiaries of the Interreg results. Public authorities, especially at local level, should play a central role as enablers of these solutions, supported in their development by experts (universities, sectoral agencies) and with crucial involvement from private sector.
- This all ties in Interreg's territorial integrated approach as its main added value.

Key reflections on the future of Interreg's climate change action

- Session participants agreed PO2 (climate change) should remain mandatory in post-27, considered the most important topic for programmes to fund.
- PO structure should be more flexible and foresee bridges between POs – especially when tackling environmental and resilience issues, links can (and should) be made with all other POs. For example, a project tackling energy poverty could equally fit within PO2 and PO4, making an arbitrary and irrelevant placement of PO/SO.
- Concerns that minimum thematic concentration will be difficult to be reached in 21-27, some programmes are struggling to have sufficient projects in PO2.
- Strong need to find new beneficiaries and implementing partners in order to increase the programme's impact and outreach.
- SOs help categorise target action of project, but are often artificially allocated. E.g. SO 2.4 being very general and open, often the only one selected, compared to more narrow SOs.
- Types of intervention too limiting (disaster oriented).
- More reflection needed on the appropriateness and enabling-element of indicators.
- Fast-moving topic - need more flexibility. The reality of a programming period means that we are tackling climate change as we see it at programming phase.
- Important to develop a needs assessment of the programme area.

Launch of Thematic Working Group

- The Thematic Working Group for A Greener Europe 2021-2027 was launched at the end of the session.
- The objectives around which we will work and collaborate are:
 - Facilitate exchange through network meetings, project visits and webinars.
 - Gain and share knowledge through thematic analysis and online community engagement.
 - Join forces on promotion through representation at events, promotion at EU stands and the communication campaign via social media and website visibility.
 - Through joint promotion efforts, we aspire to go beyond and reach higher spheres showcasing Interreg visibility and supporting programmes in reaching and engaging with the European Institutions and thematic stakeholders.
- Programmes will receive additional information within the next weeks.

Conclusions and Plans for Follow-up

- Report on climate change topic to be prepared by Interact using session outcomes as the basis.
- Calendar of next meetings of Thematic Working group to be agreed.
- Dissemination of working group launch to all programmes.
- Physical event with working group participants to take place until the end of the year. Event agenda to be shared and agreed with working group participants.
- Thematic Analysis in the framework of A Greener Europe will be delivered by Interact

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Session Agenda

Introduction

Role of Interreg in the "A Greener Europe" PO 21-27

Perspectives from the European Commission

EU Green Policy Framework – shared objectives

Mapping of existing EU funds and instruments covering climate change action

Plenary discussion

What do you think about Interreg's position?

What is the added-value of cooperation?

Group work Session 1

How does Interreg stand out in addressing climate change?
Where does it make more sense to build bridges?
Which topic/sector is more promising for cooperation?
Which specific territories?
Who do we need on board? (target groups to focus on)

Group work session 2 - Future scope of work for climate action and Interreg

Should PO2 remain mandatory?
PO2 allocation overall – more, less or the same?
Could climate change be tackled differently?
How to bridge climate resilience with other PO topics?

Group work Session 3 – Greener Europe in Practice

Does this breakdown by specific objectives make sense? Do they help you tackle climate change challenges?
What about the indicators? Do they reflect Interreg reality?

Greener Europe - New steps for Thematic Working Group 2021-2027

Launch of Thematic Working Group
How can programmes get further involved?
Best approaches to working together