

Tackling border obstacles

B-solutions for Interreg

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | 7 March 2024

Overview

Over 20 Interreg programme representatives participated in the discussion related to how Interreg and b-solution can join forces, when it comes to tackle administrative and legal obstacles.

Cinzia Dellagiacomma introduced the DG REGIO project 'b-solution', which is implemented by Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). In addition, different case studies were presented

- Going beyond obstacles in yachting internship and training“
A *b-solutions*' case by Province of Lucca (Regional Contact Point of Interreg Marittimo)
- On safe legal ground - cross-border cooperation in disaster response“
A *b-solutions*' case by EGTC South Tyrol – Tyrol - Trentino

Finally, a call for proposals by b-solution was highlighted and it was clearly explained which kind of border obstacles will be dealt with: namely legal and administrative obstacles which arise because of:

- lack of coherence of legislation applicable on the different sides of the border
- inconsistencies, non-existence, or overlapping of different administrative procedures
- applicable European, national or regional legislation or administrative procedures do not take into account the specificity of cross-border interaction

Key discussion points

- Have Interreg programme made a study on legal cross-border obstacles in their programme area?
- How are Interreg programmes implementing ISO 1?
- How could Interreg and *b-solutions* “join forces”?
- Can Interreg actors benefit from *b-solutions*?
- What would Interreg programmes need to address legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation?

How do Interreg and *b-solutions* complete each other?

Interreg as the financing instrument for ETC has had an enormous impact on CBC in Europe, BUT **border obstacles persist** and affect many aspects of life in border regions such as:

- **access to public services:** offer of public transport, reimbursement of healthcare costs;
- **access to the labour market:** administrative burdens, slow recognition, limitation to working remotely;
- **management of common resources or natural areas** (parks, rivers, etc.): lack of governance, incompatible regulations on the protection of biodiversity or on the sharing of energy.

***b-solutions* for Interreg**

- It increases the effectiveness of Interreg: providing expert support analysis to follow up on the implementation of Interreg projects that stalled because of legal and/or administrative obstacles
- It expands the potential of Interreg: Offering a first step towards approaching legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation which can be developed as Interreg projects under ISO 1
- It supports regional development and promotes cooperation: removing 1/5 of border obstacles could lead to GDP +2% in border regions and 1 million new jobs and promoting European integration

Lessons learned so far?

- Legal and administrative obstacles are many and different, as are their root causes
- There are no off-the-shelf solutions! Solutions must be tailored to the specificities of the territories involved – every region, every country is different
- Solutions can involve several options: change illegal frameworks, harmonise administrative practices, use of complementary tools such as INTERREG, EGTC
- It is important to have: deep analysis, political commitment, information sharing, multi-level engagement, capacity building

Inputs from the audience

Legal and administrative obstacles are perceived in many border regions and therefore also by Interreg programmes. There are different approaches to them: one representative of an Interreg programme shared that the programme does not select project proposals if these present legal obstacles during the risks analysis phase run by the programme before selecting projects; In the area of Poland-Saxony difficulties have been detected concerning the use of the hospital by citizens from both Poland and Germany in the twin city of Gubin-Guben, but no solution is found yet because of the absence of an agreement between the competent authorities.

One example of how a programme will start tackling legal obstacle was offered by Interreg Netherlands-Vlanders: they will implement a project under ISO 1 to tackle legal obstacles in the area, in partnership with local universities and external consultants if needed. A working group has mapped obstacles in the area and will start consulting on these obstacles to try to elaborate solutions and involve competent authorities in Belgium and in the Netherlands.

In a brief discussion on the role of b-solutions with regard to the European Commission's proposal "Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions", the delivery team highlighted the relevance of b-solutions in collecting evidence of legal and administrative obstacles hindering cross-border cooperation. This evidence is in turn used by stakeholders like the European Commission and the European Parliament to explain the urgency to set up a mechanism to support local authorities solving such obstacles, like the "Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions" tool.

Regulations and articles of particular significance

Common Provisions Regulation

Interreg Regulation

Amended proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context (COM(2023) 790 final, 12.12.2023)

Conclusions, plans for followed up

The meeting gave an overview of when and how Interreg programmes can use b-solutions. Further online events of b-solutions together with Interact are planned to showcase some practical examples and highlight the advantages for Interreg programmes.

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