

Promoting cross-border services: Interreg specific objectives for Interreg specific solutions

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

Overview

20 Interreg specialists including colleagues from D1 and D2 units in DG Regio joined the session on the future of Interreg Specific Objectives (ISOs) and the importance of cross-border services.

Methodology

The session covered two key topics:

- The ISOs: Challenges related to implementation and future options
- Cross-border services as one of the high ends of cooperation

For both topics scene-setting on the issue prepared the ground for the interactive discussion part.

Key discussion points

Interreg Specific Objectives – rationale & challenges:

Olivier Baudalet (DG Regio D2) and Simona Pohlova (D1) explained the rationale of the ISOs. The uptake of the ISOs has been quite divergent.

- **ISO 1:** Total allocation about 1.5 bn EUR; 560 MEUR of the total allocation have been allocated by the interregional programmes; all CBC programmes except of four have opted for it; the most popular actions are people-to-people (25% of the allocation); 20% for building institutional capacity. It is a very flexible policy tool and it can address the unexpected needs of any Interreg programme (NB: from start of programming to end of the programme it takes about a decade!). Moreover, it allows for capitalization and embedding of results. To sum it up: ISO1 is considered a very successful tool, with significant impact through its leverage effect.
- **ISO 2:** It is a continuation of the previous priority on border management for external programmes (it was also open for internal programmes); a focus is the rehabilitation of border crossing points at the external orders; it is clear that security will remain high on the agenda – Interreg will have to define its niche since there are several other CPR funds working on this topic (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the

Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy)

Looking into cross-border obstacles is challenging for Interreg programmes. Studies have shown that most obstacles occur the fields of education, training and labour market issues. These are often politically very sensitive issues, where national authorities play a key role in resolving it. Interreg SK-HU is starting a mapping project for cross-border obstacles (CESCI acting as Lead Partner).

Work with ISOs requires quite often a dedicated and strategic approach: To run project generation only as bottom-up process based on open calls might not bring the right projects to address key topics or to bridge important gaps. A more flexible approach to implement the ISOs should be discussed from the very beginning in the programming process and it should be enshrined in the programme.

Cross-border public services

It is obvious that cross-border services represent the high end of cooperation since they provide high visibility for citizens and improve the quality of living in border regions.

Wiktór Szydarowski provided an overview on the work of ESPON done. A major project has been the study on Cross-border Public Services (CPS). The series of reports produced for the study provides a good overview and in particular the practical guidebook comprises many useful recommendations. Also, DG Regio has provided quite recent studies (e.g. in 2022 Study on providing public transport in cross-border regions – mapping of existing services and legal obstacles).

In EE-LV programme a public transport service in a twin city is work in progress.

Regulations and articles of particular significance

Interreg Regulation 14

Conclusions, plans for followed up

The meeting provided an insight on practical experience with ISOs and CPS – with a view to continuation of ISOs and a focus on CPS in the forthcoming period.

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