

## MOT network position statement for the future of Interreg programmes post-2027

In the broader context of the evolution of tools for multi-level cross-border governance (bilateral treaties, upcoming adoption of the BridgeforEU regulation, etc.) and observation (European platform ACROSS, etc.), as well as the negotiation of the next multiannual financial framework of the European Union and the future cohesion policy, this position statement aims to identify the priorities for the future of Interreg programmes post-2027 and to present concrete proposals. This collaborative effort was developed with around forty members of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) network representing a variety of French borders.

*The MOT network calls for increased support for cross-border cooperation due to its key role in the integration of cross-border regions.*

Cross-border territories represent 40% of the territory of the European Union and 30% of the GDP of its Member States. With more than one in three Europeans residing in a cross-border area, two million workers cross these borders every day. These areas offer significant potential for collaboration between the two sides of the border, but are often confronted with obstacles that hinder their development. [The results of a report carried out for the European Commission in 2017 suggest that the legal and administrative obstacles in land border regions likely result in a GDP loss of 458 billion euros. By removing these obstacles, the GDP of border regions could increase by 3% of the GDP of the entire EU, or 8.7% of the total GDP produced in land border regions.](#) These areas require significant support, not only for local populations, but also for the success of the European project as a whole, as they are at the heart of the resilience necessary for the wide range of crises Europe is currently experiencing.

For the next programme, starting in 2028, this implies:

- ▶ Maintaining funding dedicated to European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and expanding the budget. Interreg represents only 3% of cohesion policy, even though it makes a crucial contribution to the integration of territories across national borders.
- ▶ Maintaining the principle of **multi-level governance** of the programmes, and of the principle of joint cross-border projects (in terms of financing, governance, implementation).
- ▶ A balance between the need for increased flexibility (especially in the event of crises), and programming logic, which is essential for ecological planning and regional development processes.
- ▶ Recognising **the importance of the territorial dimension of the programmes** and of bringing Interreg closer to the territories in a way that covers the different scales of cooperation: local cross-border territories (living areas); Euroregions; macro-regions, and similar cooperation areas.
- ▶ The assertion that the ultimate objective of ETC is to **contribute to European integration through these cross-border territories**, for the benefit of people on both sides of the border and by involving them in all aspects of this integration (economic, functional, institutional, cognitive, cultural and interpersonal).
- ▶ **The preservation of specific regulations for territorial cooperation** in the regulatory corpus of cohesion policy, which allows the specific nature of cross-border territories to be taken into account, while ensuring that there is no inconsistency with the provisions of cohesion policy or other regulatory aspects of the European Union.
- ▶ With regard to land borders, the removal of the concept of the 25-kilometer band used to calculate a Member State's ERDF allocation under the "European Territorial Cooperation" objective, as it does not recognise the diversity of these territories. A 25-kilometer band in the mountains, for example, is not comparable to that of a lowland territory, where the distances to be travelled to access various services of daily life are shorter. One possibility here would be to base it on the areas considered "cross-border regions" within the meaning of the Schengen Borders Code or, alternatively, on NUTS 3.

## Recommendations for a higher-impact 2028-2034 programme:

### 1. Regarding ISO1 “Better governance of cooperation”, as well as synergies between Interreg programmes and bilateral governance mechanisms

- ▶ 1.1 Simplify and reformulate the specific objectives of ISO 1 21-27 for **greater clarity** for project leaders.
- ▶ 1.2 Strengthen, via ISO1, existing and emerging cross-border cooperation structures, and focus on synergies between the local, regional, national and European levels for **better horizontal and vertical coordination**.
- ▶ 1.3 **Rely on cross-border bodies** as “cooperation catalysts” to bring about high-quality cross-border projects.
- ▶ 1.4 Grant, at the level of Interreg A programmes, a **higher funding rate** (up to 100%, following the example of Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders) to **projects of strategic interest**: one dedicated to **territorial observation** and the other to the **resolution of cross-border obstacles** along the entire border.
- ▶ 1.5 Make the link between the resolution of cross-border obstacles and the implementation of the “**BridgeforEU**” regulation by leaving the possibility of co-financing the border “coordination points” resulting from the latter. Indeed, due to their crucial role in resolving obstacles, actors acting at the state level should be fully involved in this type of project.
- ▶ 1.6 **Encourage programmes to launch calls for ISO 1 projects at the beginning of the programme** so as to structure cooperation and establish a strategic framework that will benefit other thematic or territorial projects in the programme.
- ▶ 1.7 Encourage closer relations between project leaders and programme administrators prior to the submission of the project, in order to enable a **dialogue** with the instructor during the application drafting phase and to better align the project with the requirements of the call for projects.
- ▶ 1.8 Encourage project leaders (simple, thematic and territorial projects) to justify the relevance of their proposals by relying on **data, territorial diagnostics and maps** made available by territorial observatories, national observatories (INSEE, ANCT, BBSR, etc.) and European observatories (in particular the European platform ACROSS Data Hub).

- ▶ 1.9 Each programme should include a budget (either via a specific ISO1 project or via technical assistance) to finance actions aimed at raising awareness of the issues and problems **specific to cross-border contexts**, as well as at **increasing the skills** of stakeholders through language training and training on the functioning of the political-administrative system of the neighbouring country, knowledge of the culture and history shared or not shared with these countries. These training courses should be aimed at stakeholders at all levels (agents of MAs and JSs, project beneficiaries and leaders, local and national partner administrations, elected representatives, citizens/general public, etc.).

### 2. Regarding P05 “A Europe closer to its citizens” (territorialisation)

- ▶ 2.1 Encourage the **territorial approach** permitted by this PO for all cross-border programmes (Interreg A) in order to facilitate the distinction between functional territories and institutional territories, while strengthening the proximity of Interreg to territories and populations. This should be accompanied by greater visibility of Interreg and involvement of border residents and local project leaders.
- ▶ 2.2 Increase the share of the budget envelope allocated to the territorial approach within each programme to enable greater integration at the level of **cross-border living areas** and thus strengthen the territorial impact of Interreg A programmes.
- ▶ 2.3 Given the diversity of cross-border contexts at European borders, it is necessary to:
  - Apply a principle of **subsidiarity** in order to allow for a differentiated approach according to the specificities of each border and territory;
  - Assume **equity**, which does not correspond to equality, in order to avoid deadweight loss effects: the entire border of the programme does not necessarily have to be linked by functional areas, and these areas do not systematically have to receive the same budget envelope in the same programme;
  - **Recognise the role of EGTCs** (and equivalent cross-border structures) as local drivers and facilitators, enabling continuity and capitalisation in long-term cooperation;
  - At the same time, enable areas without an EGTC to develop cross-border strategies leading to concrete projects and to gradually structure themselves, or to identify existing **flexible and responsive** mechanisms that can be used for support;
  - Capitalise on the experiences of the 21-27 programming to **better define the division of responsibilities** between the coordinator of a “functional areas” and the OP, as well as to resolve issues of conflicts of interest where this type of problem persists;

- Enable “functional areas” to fund both **structural projects** and smaller “**people-to-people**” projects, according to the needs and specific history of each cross-border living area.

#### *Functional areas*

- ▶ 2.4 Enable territories, EGTCs and programmes to better define functional areas in a more coherent way that corresponds to a definition shared at the European level. In preparation for future programming, move towards a **common framework of understanding** of what constitutes a “functional area/cross-border living area”: DG REGIO could entrust experts such as the MOT or CESCO with the task of **drawing up a Decision-making Guide** for the definition of the perimeters of functional areas for programmes (*toolbox with checkboxes, indicators to be taken into account, etc.*).
- ▶ 2.5 Encourage each functional area coordinator to rely on **data** from cross-border observatories on each border, national observatories, and the ACROSS Data Hub platform to justify the geographical scope of their intervention, especially for areas being created without a clearly predefined history or structure.
- ▶ 2.6 Provide the coordinating structures of the functional areas with the **financial and human (engineering) resources** necessary to fulfil their role as a multi-level cross-border intermediary, while allowing them to create synergies with the dynamics of ISO1 projects and simple thematic projects. These resources should be provided by Interreg and should better take into account the workload that such a coordination mission entails.
- ▶ 2.7 Recognise, within the framework of OP5, but also more generally, the importance of **structural projects** and **cross-border public services**. Cross-border **accessibility through mobility, including maritime mobility**, should be recognised as a prerequisite for all cross-border cooperation and interaction (particularly to support the emergence of cross-border employment areas), even if its funding often exceeds the capacities of Interreg, and must be taken into account by other European (regional ERDF) or domestic programmes. The “functional areas” should thus be encouraged by the programmes to:
  - Develop cross-border public services (CPS);
  - Strengthen synergies with ERDF OPs and other national or European funding sources;
  - Involve the administrative levels and actors with relevant expertise (regions, operators, etc.);
  - Produce cross-border data at the local level on cross-border flows by financing household travel surveys at the functional area level.

### 3. Micro-projects (people-to-people)

- ▶ 3.1 Renew the budget allocations for micro-projects or “*projects of limited financial volume*” for Interreg A cross-border programmes in order to strengthen mutual trust between residents and develop a sense of belonging to a given cross-border area.
- ▶ 3.2 **Reduce payment delays**, which slow down and put projects at risk, and guarantee a mandatory **advance of funds**, following the example of Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders, which offers an advance of 40%, on micro-projects in order to encourage new, less experienced promoters and those with weaker financial resources to invest in Interreg A programming (private sector/associations). Advance payments should be made by the programme and more localised technical assistance should be provided to support these smaller project leaders.
- ▶ 3.3 Encourage programmes to guarantee a **100% funding rate** for micro-projects, following the example of Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders, so as to avoid the search for additional funding, in order to increase efficiency and responsiveness in the implementation of these “citizen” initiatives.
- ▶ 3.4 Maintain a **diversity of possible themes**, excluding research and innovation, so as not to overly limit micro-projects and their potential to pave the way for larger projects.
- ▶ 3.5 Enable programmes to study the possibility of making volunteering eligible for project expenses within the framework of micro-projects (‘accounting valorisation of volunteering’ for associations).

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*The MOT Network remains mobilised to ensure that the future generation of Interreg programmes is even more ambitious and attuned to the specificities of cross-border territories in order to move towards true integration across borders!*

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## Appendix:

The [Cross-Border Deal](#): concrete recommendations on ten key themes of cooperation, from the MOT Borders Forum 2024 (MOT, December 2024)

Manifesto [for the recognition and better consideration of “cross-border living areas” in public action](#) (MOT, November 2024)

MOT's [first position paper on European Territorial Cooperation after 2027](#) (MOT, September 2024)

[First assessment of the implementation of SCTs: towards an integrated management of cross-border issues?](#): An approach through different scales of cooperation (MOT, October 2020)



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