



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

DIPARTIMENTO PER LE POLITICHE DI COESIONE E PER IL SUD
Ufficio V – Ufficio per le politiche territoriali e la cooperazione territoriale
IL DIRETTORE GENERALE

STRATEGIC PROJECT “SYNERGIES”: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR FUNDS’ INTEGRATION

COURTESY TRANSLATION OF: FOREWORD, ABSTRACT, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (INTEGRAL TEXT [HERE](#))

GUIDELINES

Experiences and tools

Presidency of the Council of Ministers

Department for Cohesion Policy and Southern Italy

DG V - Territorial Policies and Territorial Cooperation

Unit XVIII – Coordination and Monitoring of Interreg Programmes

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2. PREAMBLE

These Guidelines have been developed with the aim of offering a replicable operational methodology and featuring an applied path tested with some Italian Regions, aimed at strengthening multilevel governance and promoting effective synergies between European funds at territorial level. At the core of this process lies the strategic valorisation of the INTERREG projects’ portfolio, as a lever for integration and a catalyst for greater impact on territorial public policies.

In a European context marked by profound transformations—green and digital transition, innovation, cohesion and resilience—the ability to build synergistic connections between cohesion funds, national funds and directly managed instruments becomes crucial for sustainable, balanced and inclusive territorial development. These needs have been highlighted in the Letta¹ and Draghi² reports, the Council Conclusions on the 9th Cohesion Report³, the European Court of Auditors⁴, and by major national and European research centres⁵.

Regional strategies, S3/S4, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS), and macro-regional and sea-basin strategies are increasingly interconnected with European programming tools, generating new opportunities for integration and capitalisation. Promoting coherence among these instruments allows for optimal resource allocation,

¹ “Reinforcing interregional and interstate cooperation”

[Source: Enrico Letta, *Much More than a Market*, April 2024 – European Council report]

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>

² “A Competitiveness Coordination Framework” to foster EU-wide coordination in priority areas, replacing other overlapping coordination instruments

[Source: Mario Draghi, *Report on the Future of European Competitiveness*, June 2024 – European Commission]

https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en

³ “[...] the need for complementarities and synergies between cohesion policy and other relevant policies and initiatives” [Source: European Commission, Press Release IP/24/1616, April 2024 – Adoption of the 9th Cohesion Report] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1616

⁴ European Court of Auditors – Special Report 23/2022 on synergies in EU funding programmes

https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/sr22_23

⁵ See also the [Final report](#) by DG REGIO on fund synergies: “Strategic coordination and financial complementarity of CPR funds with other EU instruments” – February 2025



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prevents duplication, strengthens policy impact, and contributes to the Union's goals on sustainability, competitiveness and inclusion.

The Guidelines fall within the framework of the National Technical Assistance Plan for European Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG) 2014–2020, as the final output of the strategic project *Synergies*, and are based on a concrete experimentation carried out with five Italian Regions. Leveraging the outputs of top-performing INTERREG projects, they explore ways to connect mainstream programming with European territorial cooperation, also enhancing INTERREG’s role as a bridge to directly managed EU programmes such as Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe.

In line with EU regulations for 2021–2027⁶ and with the Italian Partnership Agreement⁷, Regional Programmes have incorporated references to macro-regional strategies (EUSAIR, EUSALP) and sea-basin strategies (WestMED), and have committed to outlining interregional cooperation actions to reinforce the European dimension of regional action.

Throughout the programming period, the Department for Cohesion Policies and Southern Italy, in its role as national coordination authority for ERDF funds, has promoted a structured and continuous dialogue with Regional Managing Authorities to support coordination with Interreg programmes, the embedding of strategic macro-regional and sea-basin priorities, and the development of cooperation actions, thereby facilitating the implementation of integration principles.

The *Synergies* project has continued this effort by producing practical tools and concrete recommendations on governance, monitoring, communication and evaluation. The full range of activities—from preliminary investigations to technical and operational meetings—enabled the testing of a flexible and adaptable methodology that can potentially be extended to all Italian Regions.

A distinguishing feature of this process has been the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation, understood as systemic collaboration among different levels of government—

⁶ Article 11, paragraph 1, points (b)(ii) and (iii), of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 laying down Common Provisions requires Member States to specify in their Partnership Agreements, respectively: “the coordination, demarcation and complementarity between the Funds and, where appropriate, coordination between national and regional programmes”, and “the complementarities and synergies between the Funds covered by the Partnership Agreement [...] and other Union instruments [...] and, where appropriate, projects funded under Horizon Europe”.

⁷ [Italian Partnership Agreement](#)



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European, national, regional and local—and between public and private actors, in a multilevel governance perspective. Such cooperation constitutes an enabling condition for the success of territorial policies and for achieving the Union’s common objectives, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

INTERREG thus confirms its role as a strategic laboratory for promoting funds’ integration, territorial innovation, the international positioning of Italian Regions, and the twin green and digital transitions—contributing to Europe’s technological sovereignty and the resilience of local communities.

This work also aims to contribute to the debate on the future of cohesion policy post-2027, within the broader reflection on the 2028–2034 cycle. In this perspective, strengthening integrated governance, expanding the use of shared tools across shared management and direct management funds, and recognising cooperation as a driver of public policy effectiveness are challenges and opportunities that call for concerted action, technical capacity, and shared vision.

We thank the team of Unit XVIII of the Department, the group of experts, the Regional and INTERREG Managing Authorities, and the regional reference Units for their valuable contributions. We hope that these Guidelines will inspire new practices, support the administrations involved, and contribute to a more ambitious, modern and results-oriented European cohesion policy.

Head of DG V

Raffaele Parlangeli

Head of Unit XVIII

Paolo Galletta



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Abstract

These Guidelines are addressed to the Managing Authorities (MAs) of mainstream programmes financed by the EU cohesion policy, to the INTERREG MAs, and to the related regional reference units. Their aim is to valorise and capitalise on the results of European Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG) and the lessons learned in strengthening coordination between funds and programmes; to support Italian Regions and Autonomous Provinces engaged in this challenge during the 2021–2027 period; and to formulate operational recommendations and proposals to improve the quality and overall impact of cohesion policy in the next programming cycle.

The Guidelines represent the final output of the "Synergies Project", a pilot initiative of Directorate General V – Territorial Policies and European Territorial Cooperation –Unit XVIII – Coordination and Monitoring of INTERREG Programmes of the Department for Cohesion Policies and Southern Italy (the Department) of the Presidency of the Council of ministers.

Based on the methodology developed by the Department, Synergies involved the regional units in charge of INTERREG, the corresponding MAs, and the ERDF MAs of five pilot Regions (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Puglia, Sicily and Valle d’Aosta) in an implementation process aimed at preliminarily identifying the thematic areas where INTERREG’s potential could be best exploited, to be subsequently expanded and detailed, based on the evidence collected during dedicated meetings.

The project activities of Synergies represent a concrete implementation of Article 11 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. Furthermore, Article 22, paragraph 3(a), points iii and viii, specifies that Regional Programmes (RPs) must consider "the need for investment and the complementarity and synergies with other forms of support," and "macro-regional and sea-basin strategies", when Member States and Regions participate in them. It is also required that, for each specific objective, the types of related actions and their expected contribution to the objectives be indicated, including, where applicable, macro-regional strategies, sea-basin strategies, and territorial just transition plans supported by the JTF; and that interregional, cross-border, and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or outside the Union, where relevant, be identified. Article 58 also states that "Managing Authorities may provide programme contributions, from one or more programmes, to existing or newly established financial instruments at national, regional, transnational or cross-border level, implemented directly by the Managing Authority or under its responsibility, which contribute to achieving specific objectives."



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Considering these provisions, incorporated into Italy’s Partnership Agreement, and of INTERREG’s role, the Department has supported cooperation between INTERREG and mainstream regional actors to promote funds’ coordination and integration since the ERDF RPs’ programming phase in 2022.

Therefore, Synergies carried forward the development of a shared vision between the national authority and the Regions on the role of INTERREG and of the strategies in the cross-cutting fields of research and innovation, through three key actions:

Support for integrated governance: The project enabled the activation of dialogue between INTERREG and ERDF units on ways to improve information, planning, and implementation flows across funds in a synergic perspective, for the benefit of territories. In particular, it highlighted to the ERDF MAs of the five pilot Regions the opportunities for capitalisation—in calls and regional policies—of the best outputs from Interreg and Horizon2020 projects, enhancing the dissemination of 2014–2020 INTERREG flagship projects, further selected and integrated with projects reported by regional INTERREG units.

Awareness-raising on strategies, facilitation of embedding, and cooperation actions: The integration of EUSAIR, EUSALP and WestMED priorities into ERDF Regional Programmes was promoted, highlighting the links with the specific objectives of the programmes, as well as by identifying projects already implemented and providing examples of potential developments. The need to improve embedding monitoring and the related synergies was also stressed. To this end, information on past cooperation actions under the ERDF RPs was included, and the opportunity to develop new cooperation actions was promoted, drawing on Interreg experiences and expertise.

Facilitation of joint evaluation and communication activities: Promoting synergies between funds requires continuous analysis and enhanced communication efforts, which were deemed essential by project stakeholders. Activities also included the study of good practices and proposals for coordinated evaluations between Interreg and regional programmes, and other programmes⁸.

⁸ Performance of European Partnerships Biennial Monitoring Report 2024 on partnerships in Horizon Europe. European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. Directorate G — Common Policy Centre. Unit G4 – Common Missions & Partnerships Service, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/events/upcoming-events/biennial-monitoring-report-bmr-2024-partnerships-horizon-europe-launch-2024-09-19_en



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The Guidelines are structured in **four chapters**.

The **first chapter** presents the adopted methodology, the strategic framework, and introduces the key concepts and actions for the creation of synergies, including coordination opportunities between various European funds and the pilot experimentation limited to ERDF Regional Programmes, INTERREG and Horizon.

The analysis then focuses on the implementation path and the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an "integrated vision" of investment opportunities, embracing environmental, social, and economic challenges to promote evidence-based cohesion policies geared towards balanced and sustainable development. The SDG strategic framework is particularly relevant in light of the variety of available studies and data at various territorial levels (e.g. Italian National Statistics Institute -ISTAT⁹ and Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development -ASVIS¹⁰ reports), and has gained further value following recent amendments to the Italian Constitution, which include environmental protection, health and biodiversity among the fundamental principles—stressing the importance of aligning economic activity with social and environmental goals to ensure the well-being of present and future generations.

To support this vision, the analysis focused on identifying and describing a selection of SDGs linked to the thematic areas identified by the Regions (ERDF MAs) as most relevant for the use of INTERREG outputs and related to both regional S3 strategies and macro-regional and sea-basin strategies in which Italy participates (EUSAIR, EUSALP, and WestMED). This link between strategic and operational levels of funds’ use, combined with the in-depth focus on pilot Regions, offers an initial test of a method to foster funds’ integration and define new action opportunities within each Region to enhance INTERREG’s contribution.

The **second chapter** focuses on governance and the role of macro-regional (EUSAIR and EUSALP) and sea-basin (WestMED) strategies, highlighting their key role in shaping an integrated approach across national, regional and European funds. The 2021–2027 EU cohesion policy, with an allocation to Italy of over EUR 75 billion, is complemented by the Development and Cohesion Fund and other national programmes, as well as by the **National Recovery and Resilience Plan** (NRRP) resources. Despite improvements in management, monitoring, and transparency capacities, performance challenges persist, exacerbated by structural weaknesses—particularly in Southern Regions. The recent cohesion reform

⁹ <https://www.istat.it/produzione-editoriale/rapporto-sdgs-2024/>

¹⁰ [ASviS Report](#)



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strengthened coordination by establishing a national Steering Committee to harmonise interventions across all levels of government, prioritising sustainability, infrastructure, digitalisation and innovation. At the same time, Italy is committed to using platforms such as **STEP** to attract investments in strategic technologies and develop an industrial policy aligned with green and digital transitions, enhancing the coordination of EU policies¹¹ and their territorial impact.

Strategies such as EUSAIR, EUSALP and WestMED—mainly supported through INTERREG projects—can become key instruments for promoting sustainable development and territorial cohesion via interregional cooperation. Italy plays a central role in these strategies, promoting synergies between EU, national and regional programmes. In particular, the embedding process integrates macro-regional priorities into regional programmes and strengthens multilevel coordination. This approach aims to consolidate Italy’s participation in European networks, fostering effective and synergistic management of resources, including through new coordination mechanisms (Managing Authority Networks and EUSAIR Financial Dialogue, EUSALP Financial Dialogue, and the Mediterranean Multi-Programme Mechanism) and the analytical approaches promoted under interregional programmes such as ESPON, INTERREG EUROPE, INTERACT and URBACT.

The **third chapter** focuses on the experiences and opportunities for synergies’ development, with particular reference to cooperation actions, the implementation of embedding and mainstreaming—namely the convergence between INTERREG projects and the investments made under national and regional programmes supported by ERDF and ESF+. Beyond cross-border and transnational cooperation, interregional cooperation today constitutes a strategic lever to promote territorial cohesion, sustainable development and innovation on a European and Mediterranean scale—broadening the scope of INTERREG programmes and macro-regional/sea-basin strategies to address common challenges, exploit complementarities between territories, and activate integration processes capable of generating added value. The experience of Italian Regions shows that cooperation is no longer just a tool for sharing best practices, but is evolving into a true public policy laboratory, capable of strengthening multilevel governance and steering investments towards strategic sectors such as green and digital transition, innovation, sustainable tourism, and the blue economy.

In this context, the third chapter delves into the regulatory and operational framework supporting integration between programmes and financial instruments at European, national

¹¹ [The future of EU cohesion: Scenarios and their impacts on regional inequalities. Cost of non-Europe](#), December 2024.



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and regional level, highlighting opportunities offered by tools such as cooperation actions, **Interregional Innovation Investments** (I3), mainstreaming of cooperation results in Regional Programmes, and multiprogramme mechanisms developed in the Mediterranean context. Particular attention is given to the role of macro-regional strategies (EUSAIR, EUSALP) and sea-basin strategies (WestMED) and to the support platforms of interregional programmes, which strengthen coordination across different levels of government and facilitate the creation of strategic partnerships on common interest themes. The analysed experiences confirm the potential of synergies between funds and programmes to improve public spending quality, accelerate the implementation of innovative solutions, and consolidate the positioning of Italian Regions in major European networks.

The **fourth chapter** highlights the tools and proposals for building synergies provided by platforms such as SMART CTE¹², INDEX¹³, INTERACT’s cooperation action tool¹⁴, and the Horizon–Interreg dashboard¹⁵. These tools promote integrated knowledge management, enabling the identification of complementarities between projects and the creation of strategic partnerships. This approach facilitates investment capitalisation and knowledge reuse, reduces duplication, and accelerates the implementation of innovative solutions.

For the pilot Regions, key strategic and project-based references were identified to reinforce synergies between a selection of Interreg and Horizon projects and the sustainable development and smart specialisation (S3/S4) strategies at the regional level. The objectives of Interreg and Horizon—focused on sustainability and resilience—represent a key factor for aligning local goals with the SDGs, with a tangible impact on global challenges such as climate change and the circular economy. The focus on pilot Regions shows how Interreg and Horizon flagship projects, selected on the basis of the 2021–2027 strategic objectives and S3 priorities, can help improve regional performance against the SDG targets. The operational strategies identified for these Regions include various options, ranging from promoting new projects in regional areas of excellence, to maintaining the INTERREG project focus on SDGs and S3 themes where progress is stronger or weaker, or adopting combinations of these approaches.

¹² [Smart CTE](#)

¹³ <https://www.interact-eu.net/about-interact/our-tools/index>

¹⁴ <https://www.cooperationactions.eu/region/>

¹⁵ [INTERREG - HORIZON dashboard](#)



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Finally, the Guidelines include **general and chapter-specific conclusions, operational recommendations, a roadmap for capitalising on the results of the Project**, and perspectives for the future of synergies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Promoted and coordinated by the Department for Cohesion Policies and Southern Italy, the Synergies Project was launched as a continuation of the technical support provided to Regions during the drafting phase of the 2021–2027 programmes¹⁶. Its aim was to offer operational support to the challenge of funds’ integration, particularly between the INTERREG Goal and the Investment for Jobs and Growth Goal.

The project methodology, based on capitalising on the best INTERREG projects within ERDF Regional Programmes, enabled—together with five pilot Regions—the translation of programming intentions into a concrete pathway for implementation, including of analysis, design and operational proposals on synergies, with a strong focus on enhancing good practices already existing in the territories.

The analysis confirmed that funds’ and programmes’ integration is not only desirable, but a necessary condition to enhance the effectiveness of public policies, especially in an increasingly complex context with increasing investment pressures.

The experiences shared with the Regions demonstrated the existence of significant good practices of coordination¹⁷ between INTERREG and regional cohesion programmes, as well as with those under direct management. However, these are often the result of personal relationships or local contingencies, rather than structured frameworks. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden their scope, support the coordination between central and regional administrations with shared tools, and transform good practices into systemic rules.

The intervention by Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto at the Interreg GO! event on 27–28 March 2025 reiterated the urgency of modernising cohesion policy, highlighting the strategic value of European cooperation and the key role of INTERREG in strengthening integration among countries and regions. In this context, the call for gathering contributions from the

¹⁶ Support was provided for defining the content of the box required under Article 22 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 concerning coordination with Interreg, embedding of strategies, and cooperation actions.

¹⁷ See regional case studies in the annex.



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territories to enhance the added value of INTERREG programmes serves as a clear indication for Managing Authorities and stakeholders involved in programming processes. The Synergies Project fully aligns with this perspective.

Within the strategic framework of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the 2030 UNO Agenda—viewed as an operational compass for consistent, equitable, and place-based investments—Synergies created and shared with the Regions a sample of “flagship”¹⁸ INTERREG projects. It selected outputs most relevant to the specific objectives of the regional programmes analysed, ensuring replicability and utility for current and future programming. The Project demonstrated how such outputs, if promoted through targeted regional calls and connected to supranational networks, can enhance innovation, foster international cooperation, and contribute to the systemic implementation of territorial, macro-regional, and sea-basin strategies of the EU, in alignment with regional S3/S4 strategies.

The Guidelines also revealed that a collaborative approach—supported by shared tools and based on data transparency and accessibility—can improve multilevel governance and make programming more effective.

However, there remains ample room for improvement: both upstream, in building strategic and regulatory frameworks and structured, flexible, and simplified governance processes that adopt synergies and the capitalisation of existing results as a fundamental methodological condition; and downstream, in the ability to coherently implement that strategic and programming architecture.

We conclude these Guidelines with a **brief overview of specific conclusions for each of the four chapters**, deepening a key aspect to concretely advance the integration objective.

The first chapter presents the strategic framework and the methodology adopted, based on the connection between synergies and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. These are understood not merely as a value framework, but as an **operational compass to guide investments in a consistent, equitable, and place-based manner**.

At national level, the key tool for identifying potential areas for synergy implementation and ensuring alignment with the 2030 Agenda is the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. This strategy outlines the reference framework for planning, programming, and

¹⁸ Synergies also developed a proposal of HORIZON projects for each of the five regional territories.



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evaluating environmental and territorial processes aimed at achieving the SDGs. The coordination between the Sustainable Development Strategy and the regional S3/S4 strategies further enables reflection on thematic areas for the use of cohesion funds.

The project’s methodological approach has demonstrated that the link between INTERREG outputs, regional S3/S4 strategies, and the priorities of the EUSAIR and EUSALP macro-regional strategies—as well as the WestMED Initiative—can generate concrete and measurable synergies with mainstream programming. This facilitates a strategic and integrated use of resources and contributes to addressing the challenges posed by the SDGs more effectively.

The implementation pathway for the three identified actions (1. support for integrated governance; 2. awareness-raising on strategies, facilitation of embedding, and cooperation actions; 3. facilitation of joint evaluation and communication activities) primarily involved the pilot Regions. It also enabled dialogue with other actors and analyses at both national and European levels (see Chapter 4) on the topic of synergies, laying the foundation for a more integrated and inclusive dialogue aligned with the principles of multilevel governance. This dialogue should be coherently synthesised in all fora discussing ways to improve the impact of public funding, particularly cohesion policy.

The second chapter focuses on the role of governance in creating synergies between the two cohesion objectives. The analysis shows that the creation of synergies and complementarities between national, regional, and European funds largely depends on the existence of an effective and clearly defined governance architecture. Only in a context where offices responsible for different programmes engage in structured dialogue can concrete and lasting results in terms of synergies be achieved. In particular, the main elements of integrated governance include all or most of the following:

- The existence of stable coordination units;
- The placement of INTERREG and mainstream programme officers under a single Directorate General;
- The existence of programming documents promoting coordination between programmes (e.g., Unified Plans, steering committees, joint planning and evaluation tools);
- The scheduling of periodic meetings between programme officers to capitalise on integrations and related progress;



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- The establishment of discussion forums with stakeholders and territorial actors coordinated by the Managing Authorities of both ETC and mainstream programmes and of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies.

The chapter also explores the opportunities and limitations of coordination between the ERDF Regional Programmes (RPs) of the pilot Regions and Horizon Europe, highlighting the role of INTERREG as a “bridge” between cohesion policy funds and those directly managed by the European Commission.

The third chapter addresses the embedding of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies into the RPs of the pilot Regions. Synergies aimed to provide operational support to Managing Authorities, moving beyond a view of embedding as a process limited to programming, and instead emphasising its relevance across other stages of the programme cycle.

Operational mechanisms for translating programme forecasts into implementation were examined, particularly in the definition of calls for proposals (e.g., foreseeing award criteria: including selection or award criteria aligned with MRS/SBS; aligning calls with MRS/SBS priority actions; direct financing of projects framed within those strategies). These have yet to be widely applied in practice, partly due to the lack of adequate operational guidelines.

Nonetheless, the analysis of RPs and dialogue with Managing Authorities revealed numerous examples of coordination between programmes also serving embedding purposes. These include: coordinated projects between ERDF programmes of different countries; sequential projects financed by ETC and ERDF regional programmes on MRS/SBS priority themes; identification of concrete opportunities to launch cooperation actions (Art. 22(3)(d)(vi), Reg. 2021/1060) in areas of interest for EUSAIR; coordination between RPs (Art. 73.4, Reg. 2021/1060) and direct management programmes through the Seal of Excellence (SoE), particularly with regard to S3.

The monitoring theme was also explored, with the creation of a detailed mapping of the coordination between RPs and EUSAIR and with some Managing Authorities expressing willingness to include a tag in their monitoring systems dedicated to MRS.

Additionally, the third chapter analyses already activated and replicable operational mechanisms for promoting integration between different programmes, addressing shared challenges and innovative solutions. These range from Managing Authority networks to the EUSAIR financial dialogue, EUSALP financial dialogues, and the Multi-Programme Mechanism for the Mediterranean area.



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STRATEGIC PROJECT “SYNERGIES”: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR FUNDS’ INTEGRATION

COURTESY TRANSLATION OF: FOREWORD, ABSTRACT, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (INTEGRAL TEXT [HERE](#))

The fourth chapter presents several operational and digital platforms supporting synergies, such as SMART CTE, INDEX, the HORIZON-INTERREG dashboard, and INTERACT tools. These constitute enabling infrastructures for effective processes of capitalisation, reuse, and dissemination of project outputs. The experience of the Emilia-Romagna Region is highlighted as a replicable example of strategic data use and Horizon partnerships, capable of harnessing the potential of cooperation to benefit regional programming.

The chapter also focuses on the application of the Synergies methodology to the pilot Regions. This is initially presented through correlations among SDGs, macro-themes, and INTERREG projects in relation to the 2021–2027 Specific Objectives, and later enriched by references to the national S3 and macro-regional and sea-basin strategies.

The 2023 ASviS Report on Territories ([ASviS Report and other publications](#)), which assessed the progress of the involved Regions in relation to SDGs linked to the four macro-themes (environment and energy; climate and land management; research and innovation; enterprises and entrepreneurship) selected by the five pilot ERDF Managing Authorities as most relevant for capitalising on INTERREG outputs - reveals potential synergies. These synergies could allow pilot Regions to share and deepen knowledge and resources to address the challenges identified in their strategic programming documents and INTERREG projects.

Furthermore, the Synergies experimentation shows that interregional cooperation among Regions could be gradually implemented across the entire funds’ management cycle and focus on selected priority sectors, capitalising on INTERREG experience and outputs. Starting from the four identified thematic areas, further exploration may be considered, including expanding participation to other Regions and revising and integrating the identified potential actions.

Enhancing the Value and Impact of the Synergies Project

The Synergies project enabled the testing of concrete tools and approaches for integrating European funds, with particular attention to the role of Regions in building multilevel governance models. The main results achieved over the course of the project can be summarised as follows:

- Five pilot Regions were involved in analysis, dialogue, and co-design activities (Valle d’Aosta, Liguria, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Puglia, and Sicily);
- More than 20 technical and institutional meetings were organised, with active participation from regional, national, and European Commission representatives;



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- Mapping and analysis of over 60 INTERREG and Horizon projects relevant to activating thematic and territorial synergies;
- Identification of priority areas of intervention common to regional programmes and directly managed instruments;
- Development of replicable operational proposals in governance, intervention selection, monitoring tools, communication, and evaluation;
- Production of shared outputs, including: regional factsheets, templates for project mapping, questionnaires for synergy analysis, and a support methodology.

These results demonstrate that a structured and collaborative approach can enhance existing synergies and foster new ones. In this context, the Department played an important role in facilitating dialogue, providing analytical and digital tools, and promoting an evidence-based, shared working method. This laid the groundwork for a laboratory to test innovative integration methods, with the aim of moving beyond experimentation and consolidating more mature operational practices.

The ongoing reflection on the future of cohesion policy beyond 2027 offers an opportunity to capitalise on this path. The main emerging challenges—including alignment with other EU policies, balancing crisis response with long-term strategies, the impact of the NRRP, the performance-based model, and the strengthening of administrative capacity—require a qualitative leap in both programming and management. INTERREG can play a central role in this process, both as an instrument of territorial cooperation and as a catalyst for innovation, experimentation, and project convergence.

Operational Recommendations

1. Governance: Strengthening multilevel governance, strategic frameworks, and institutional coordination.

- Leverage strategies (National Sustainable Development Strategy, S3/S4, and macro-regional/sea basin strategies) as operational frameworks for activating synergies based on INTERREG project outputs and for promoting embedding in regional programmes through cooperation actions, as demonstrated by Friuli Venezia Giulia.
- Enhance structured intra- and inter-institutional dialogue between the national authority, Regions, Managing Authorities and associated spending units, the European Commission (DG REGIO—Geographic Units and INTERREG Units D1 and D2, DG RTD,



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DG MARE, DG MENA, DG ENEST), INTERREG programmes, and managers of thematic funds through stable coordination groups (e.g., RIMA Group for the dialogue between Cohesion Policy and Horizon Europe), ensuring transparency and traceability of discussions on institutional websites.

- Pilot new forms of multilevel governance between programmes, inspired by models already launched under INTERREG (e.g., EUROMED Capitalization Approach¹⁹, Multi-Programme Mechanism in the Mediterranean²⁰), to integrate cooperation, capitalisation, and implementation models into regional programmes.
- Strengthen national coordination and strategic guidance capacities through the NRRP Steering Committee, the Monitoring and Support Committee for 2021–2027 Programmes (the so-called Partnership Agreement Committee), and the Italian Interreg Strategic Coordination Group (SCG), ensuring alignment and optimisation of resources, also in coordination with the NRRP.

2. Administrative Capacity: Simplify, train, and develop synergies in programming and implementation.

- Establish strategic and operational coherence for synergies by simplifying their programming and implementation, including the allocation of dedicated resources within ERDF and ESF+ programmes and the definition of specific indicators.
- Set up the mapping and evaluation of INTERREG outputs—which these Guidelines identify as key enablers of funds’ synergies—as a prerequisite during the programming of calls and monitor their implementation through dedicated indicators.
- Launch regional calls funded by ERDF and ESF+ resources aimed at utilising Horizon Europe’s Seal of Excellence and capitalising on INTERREG and Horizon project outputs, replicating successful models (e.g., Emilia-Romagna).
- Reinforce the role of INTERREG in delivering regional priorities by supporting interregional cooperation actions using non-funded project proposals from INTERREG calls (e.g., through development of an INTERREG Seal of Excellence).

¹⁹ <https://interreg-euro-med.eu/en/our-capitalisation-approach/>

²⁰ <https://interreg-euro-med.eu/en/mediterranean-multi-programme-mechanism/>



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3. Strategic Capitalisation and Digital Interoperability: Strengthen synergies through INTERREG support.

- Establish a national capitalisation platform for collecting, disseminating, and reusing the most promising outputs from flagship INTERREG projects, with active involvement of Regions, Managing Authorities, and cooperation programmes.
- Monitor the adequacy of interoperable digital tools (INDEX, KEEP, JEMS) and assess their interoperability with national systems ([SMART CTE](#), [OpenCoesione](#), [ItaliaDomani](#)) and other databases/platforms, to enhance data sharing, identify project synergies, and analyse territorial impacts.
- Improve the visibility of INTERREG outputs through interactive dashboards integrating results and data from Horizon.
- Harmonise the content of synergy-related sections in programme application forms to better highlight their strategic value and the scoring attributed during the project quality assessment.

4. Monitoring, Evaluation, Information, and Communication: Promote integrated approaches.

- Encourage integrated monitoring and evaluation processes across regional programmes, INTERREG, and directly managed funds, using impact-oriented approaches and highlighting European added value.
- Bridge the information gap on INTERREG through training, targeted communication, and awareness initiatives, including via digital tools and territorial channels. Specifically, promote the visibility and potential of interregional programmes as tools to strengthen transnational and cross-border programmes and mainstream interventions:
- ✓ INTERREG EUROPE: support for policy tool sharing and governance solutions via Policy Learning Platforms;
- ✓ ESPON: territorial studies and analyses providing evidence to stakeholders in support of new projects;
- ✓ URBACT: development of tools to assist cities in designing and implementing urban strategies and integrated development policies;
- ✓ INTERACT: project databases and management simplification tools, including targeted support to mainstream MAs for developing cooperation actions.



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- Enhance integrated communication on co-funded project results, involving socio-economic partners, territorial stakeholders, and civil society to broaden awareness and support for the synergies activated.

5. Cohesion and Innovation: Consolidate support for Horizon partnerships and interregional cooperation.

- Support, including financially via ERDF, Horizon partnerships based on existing models (e.g., Emilia-Romagna Region):
- Launch calls specifically aimed at utilising Horizon research results through INTERREG projects, replicating best practices tested under the Central Europe programme²¹.
- Promote collaboration among Italian Regions and with EU and non-EU Regions to share knowledge, innovative practices, and partnership networks, building on the legacy of INTERREG in financing cooperative actions.

These recommendations are complemented by a roadmap to support the evolution of cohesion policy towards greater integration and effectiveness of interventions, fully capitalising on the potential of cooperation and the capitalisation of knowledge and results.

Towards a Roadmap for the Capitalisation of Synergies Results and Future Outlook

To ensure continuity and systemic impact of the activities launched, an operational roadmap is proposed, aimed at capitalising on the results achieved and expanding the tested model. The main recommended actions include:

1. **Extension of the Synergies model** to additional Italian Regions, encouraging the use of the Guidelines as a working tool in the programming and revision processes of the ERDF and ESF+ Regional Programmes;
2. **Use of the Mediterranean, Adriatic-Ionian, Alpine–Central Europe and Interregional area-based Groups**, established within and in coordination with the Strategic Coordination Group, to promote exchanges, updates, and the sharing of practices and tools for fund synergies;

²¹ Coordination between H2020 & INTERREG CE on the capitalisation / exploitation of existing project results (interreg-central.eu)



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3. **Activation of dedicated training programmes** for regional representatives and Managing Authorities, both INTERREG and mainstream, focused on:
 - ✓ Techniques for integrated planning across funds, particularly regarding cooperation actions and the embedding of strategies;
 - ✓ Selection criteria specifically dedicated to synergies;
 - ✓ Analysis and management of strategic partnerships in collaboration with directly managed programmes;
4. **Strengthening regional information systems**, with the objective of enabling cross-cutting monitoring functions of funded projects and fostering interoperability between regional databases and national/EU platforms;
5. **Development of a digital capitalisation platform**, to systematically and openly make available the tools developed, the projects analysed, the mapped synergies, and the proposed common indicators;
6. **Design/implementation of interregional or transnational pilot projects**, with an explicit mandate to identify new synergies between INTERREG, regional programmes, and Horizon Europe in the strategic areas identified;
7. **Design/implementation of cross-border pilot projects** to test the use of INTERREG outputs in building cooperation actions, also leveraging, where relevant, the use of Integrated Territorial Instruments (ITI), participatory approaches (CLLD), cooperation structures that have demonstrated added value in terms of governance and fund management capacity (e.g., EGTCs), and mechanisms to overcome cross-border obstacles (e.g., the tool envisaged in the recently adopted [BridgeforEU Regulation](#)).