

Report

Interreg post 2027 stakeholders' consultation meeting

Subject of consultation

Shape of the post 2027 Interreg programme on the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Belarusian borderlands

Objectives of consultation

1. Identify and analyse the key spheres and problems in the region that need solutions and can be addressed by Interreg post 2027 programme;
2. Assess conditions and locate points for cooperation;
3. Collect opinions, propositions and define probable directions of Interreg post 2027 for the region.

Administration

Region	Volyn Oblast, Ukraine
Conducted by (entity)	Lviv Branch Office of Joint Secretariat
Place/venue/address	Volyn Oblast State Administration, 9 Kyivskyy Maidan Sq., Lutsk
Date	24 September 2024

Part 1.

Information about respondents

Number of participants	27 persons 21 entities represented
Categories of participants, structure and share of participation	Regional, urban, local government authorities - 6 (29%) Healthcare institutions - 6 (29%) Education institutions (schools, universities, academies), training or research centers - 1 (5%) Cultural institutions (such as museums, galleries etc.) - 1 (5%) Organisations responsible for nature/environment protection - 1 (5%) Bodies in charge of disaster and emergency risk management - 1 (5%) Economic/social partners, associations, SMEs - 2 (10%) NGOs (regional development, civic education, charity) – 3 (14%)

The level of awareness of the audience about the Poland-(Belarus)-Ukraine / Interreg and EU/Donor funded projects	<p>Low – heard of EU-funded projects without knowing details on the financing conditions, priorities, objectives etc.;</p> <p>Medium – aware of the EU-funded projects with basic knowledge on conditions, examples of projects in the region or indirectly involved in the implementation;</p> <p>High – directly involved in the Programme/projects implementation as a Monitoring Committee member or beneficiary of current or previous Poland-(Belarus)-Ukraine programme edition.</p>
	<p>Low – 7</p> <p>Medium – 7</p> <p>High - 13</p>

Part 2.

What is Interreg

The audience should be informed about the basic data on the Programme (PL-UA/PBU) - financing structure, area, cross-border cooperation frame, successful projects in the region.

The information should be adapted to the participants' awareness on the issue – if it is medium-high – please communicate rather the analysis of the previous programmes (challenges, resolutions, lessons learnt etc.).

Highly informed participants may assist in sharing the basic information for enriching the discussion.

As the majority of participants had high or medium level of awareness about the Programme, only general information about the Programme background was provided (programme periods, statistics of the supported projects, current Programme priorities, and future activities in the Programme).

Experience of the region

Please indicate which PBU/PL-UA projects (or other CBC projects) implemented in the region proved most successful in the stakeholders' opinion, brought strongest results, had highest impact etc.

Cross-border Centre in Kovel, which gave rise to other initiatives and had a significant impact on local social life
 TwoTowers project (renovation of Okolnyy Castle and opening of a modern museum space) was a major cultural initiative in the city
 Lutsk Zoo project in 2007-2013 - still developing, admitting numerous visitors regularly
 Emergency projects

Part 3.

Analysis of feedback and input on key questions

Note: After introductory input and familiarization with the audience please initiate further joint discussion and exchange of opinions of the stakeholders on each of below key questions.

<p>1. Is location next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?</p>	<p>As a summary of opinions of stakeholders please put the jointly outlined general answer whether the location next to a border is more opportunity or disadvantage and explain what key arguments state for the chosen answer.</p> <p>1. Advantages - border with Poland is an advantage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural proximity with a neighbour country, - tourism development, - good for logistics (including organizing events), - a border region is always a pioneer in new solutions, - exchange of experience and best practices, - a safer place (far from active war zone) - positive for investment attractiveness, - more revenues for communities, - ability to speak foreign languages <p>2. Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - proximity of the border with Belarus is a threat - high responsibility lies on the region in terms of safety etc. - need for constant improvement of infrastructure and services
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<p>2. Where is the biggest potential for territorial cooperation in your area ?</p>	<p>Please work on the joint identification of the region's most actual fields to be addressed in frames of Interreg orientation.</p> <p>Please list maximum 5 from below and arrange the list from the most to less actual. If other arise please add to the list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint cultural heritage; - Health services and healthy lifestyle promotion; - Protection of environment; - Responding to natural and human related threats and hazards - Cooperation between research / science / academic centres - Promotion of entrepreneurship - Facilitations for SME cross-border operability - Easy employment in the neighbouring country - Tourism development - Networking research and enterprises to innovate - Joint sport events - Border security - Road infrastructure - Public transport crossing the border - Social integration - Strengthening local identity - New technologies / innovativeness development and promotion - Other – what exactly?
<p>3. What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?</p>	<div data-bbox="710 1198 1396 1534"> <p>1. New technologies/innovativeness development and promotion</p> <p>2. Health services and healthy lifestyle promotion;</p> <p>3. Protection of environment;</p> <p>4. Responding to natural and human-related threats and hazards</p> <p>5. Tourism development</p> <p>Other – renewable energy</p> </div> <p>Please discuss the aspect of cooperation and summarise maximum 5 positive points agreed in the audience.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Creation of joint natural park areas;</p> <p>Shared health services;</p> <p>Jointly coordinated security/emergency services - fire-fighters operations across the border, etc.</p>
	<div data-bbox="710 1904 1396 2049"> <p>1. Circulation of information in the Programme, partner search and networking events</p> <p>2. Contacts established on institutional and personal level, which have continuation in other initiatives</p> </div>

	<p>3. Safety initiatives, which enabled integration in European networks</p> <p>4. Exchange of international experience and practice, involving professionals from another side of the border</p> <p>5. Different types of projects - large, regular and small, which is good for different players</p>
4. What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved?	<p>Please discuss the aspect of cooperation and summarise a maximum 5 negative issues agreed in the audience.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Nature preservation practices in a shared river basin are not unified;</p> <p>Exchanges of practical experience between places facing the same issues are complicated.</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Ukrainian National Authority does not perform its functions and does not act in support of the interests of UA beneficiaries (the system of control by the State Audit Service was introduced, exchange rates on the report date lead to financial losses, procurement procedures not harmonized with UA laws; outdated procedures for project registration in Ukraine) 2. Some political issues between our countries have not been resolved 3. Requirements to the application are not equal (e.g. building permit from UA beneficiaries while an equivalent is acceptable for Polish beneficiaries) 4. Tourism priority has been cancelled, while many institutions were willing to apply
5. What are major obstacles for a good cross-border cooperation in your area?	<p>On the issues summarized above please provide the major obstacles that interfere these issues to be duly solved.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Low and uneven economic development;</p> <p>Little knowledge of the programme and/or partner country language;</p> <p>Uneven competence and salary level of local authorities personnel, etc.</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Border crossing is complicated 2. Joint events cannot be organized in Ukraine 3. UA institutions have problems finding sources for own contribution as local budgets are allocated for more urgent needs, arising from the of war 4. Inconsistency of UA laws with Programme requirements

6. Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?	<p>Please collect probable measures/goals and reasons. Examples: Involvement of SME as partners to strengthen financial and operational capability cannot be done to regulative limitations of programme rules;</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay salary to civil servants from grant money (e.g. in local or regional governments) 2. Implement the projects in the field of culture and heritage 3. Business and innovations, creating industrial parks, business hubs
7. What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in the future Interreg?	<p>Please put the propositions that are new to the programme.</p>
	<p>Establish regional control points to perform expenditure verification in the projects</p>
8. Is there a need for some infrastructure projects?	<p>Please collect opinions/propositions of joint infrastructure projects may be established in the region in cooperation with adjacent region of the partner country.</p>
	<p>Yes, in heritage, environment, tourism infrastructure, safety, healthcare, borders, energy effectiveness, logistics and accessibility</p>
9. What should be done to facilitate the work with your counterparts in another country (governance)?	<p>Please list measures on governance that would be applicable for improvement of the cooperation between bordering countries/regions.</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate border crossing for the people working in projects 2. More on-site events, where the partners can meet - partner search forums, and annual events. 3. Joint training events for partners from both countries 4. Cancel the requirement to register projects in Ukraine as a precondition for receiving the advance payment

Part 4.

Conclusions, other topics of discussion

Please put here everything what was not covered above, but raised/expressed during discussion.

The perspective of Belarus participating in the Programme seems unrealistic

Overall assessment of the meeting by the organizer

Were the objectives of the consultation achieved?

Please refer to each objective and describe the level of engagement of the stakeholders into discussion.

All categories of stakeholders were represented at the meeting. The largest number of participants were the representatives of the authorities and healthcare institutions, which reflects the structure of the beneficiaries of the 2024-2027 Programme. The participants, involved in the implementation of the current or past Programme periods, took the most active part in the discussion and expressed their opinions on the past and current Programme period. Thus, the discussion focused mostly on technical aspects that can be improved in the Programme rather than on general cross-border cooperation issues

All the participants are aware of the benefits the proximity of the EU border brings, such as revenues from business activities, logistics, and tourism opportunities. They have also mentioned cultural links, and knowledge of foreign languages as advantages. Another interesting point was being the first to adopt new European practices. Among the disadvantages mentioned, there was high pressure on infrastructure and the need to constantly improve it. As the region also has a border with Belarus, the issues related to it, have been discussed, too. Although there were some links with this neighboring country, the perception of Belarus is now extremely negative.

Among the priority areas to be supported, the new technologies/innovativeness development and promotion, health services and healthy lifestyle promotion, protection of the environment, responding to natural and human-related threats and hazards, and tourism development have been mentioned.

Volyn Oblast is the second most active region in the Programme with many successful projects implemented in different fields. There are many people with project experience and the skills necessary for project implementation, as well as established links on both institutional and personal levels. When commenting on good practices in the Programme, the factors of good communication, integration, experience exchange and building partnerships were highlighted. On the contrary, legal inconsistencies, burdensome requirements for supporting documents and a rigid control system in the Programme as well as external factors such as political issues, and ineffective border management are seen as threats to future cooperation.

New technologies, healthcare, environment protection, responding to hazards, and tourism development (based on culture and heritage) are seen as the most crucial areas of development. As new elements suggested for the future, a new system of control (based on regional control points), more integration through joint events, support of businesses, and simplified border-crossing were mentioned as well as other technical improvements.

Interesting quotes

Please collect interesting, important quotes from the participants on the matter of future post 27 programme.

Please put Name of participant, Quote in "".

"Experience exchange is a crucial element of each project. Some people might be sceptical about it, but in fact it is a great advantage when people have the opportunity to meet, to discuss common problems, identify them, and then find resources to solve them together and have a common result. And when Polish partners show a "Ukrainian" result as a joint one, they are proud of it, and Ukrainians also show a "Polish" result as a joint one". - Victoria Homonets, the coordinator of TwoTowers project in 2014-2020.

"Soft activities make a great impact. This, in particular, concerns joint exercises, improving the skills of rescuers. Remember what the situation was recently in the south of Poland, where our rescuers provided assistance. Such emergency situations can arise in future. In my opinion, the adoption of experience, constant improvement, training are crucial as it helps to quickly react to these situations in the future. It can save someone's life". - Mykola Burlak, State Emergency Service in Volyn Oblast.

Questionnaires

As a final point of the consultation – 10-15 minutes – please ask participants to fill the questionnaire for stakeholders on-line e.g. on their smartphones/laptops using the link (QR-code) to questionnaire for stakeholders (3 language versions available).

Participants that had already filled the survey before the meeting may share the experience and discuss whether consultation allow to improve replies given earlier.

QR code was distributed

Attachments:

1. Agenda.
2. List of Participants.