

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.

Note: The required timing of the meeting is 2-3 hours

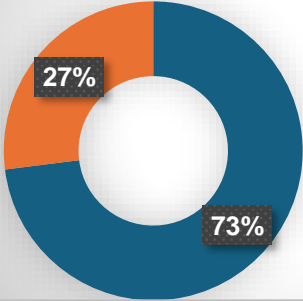
Administration

Region	Lubelskie Voivodeship
Conducted by (entity)	Department of Strategy and Development Marshal Office of Lubelskie Voivodeship in Lublin
Place/venue/address	Lublin Conference Centre Grottgera 2, Lublin, S1 room
Date	23/10/2024

Part 1.

Information about respondents

Number of participants	74 people representing 7 stakeholder groups described below
Categories of participants, structure and share of participation	<p>In the consultation meeting on the shape of the future cross-border cooperation program the following stakeholder groups participated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regional and local authorities -54 people - 73% 2. Healthcare facilities - 8 people - 11% 3. Educational institutions (schools, universities, academies), training and research centers - 6 people - 8 % 4. Cultural institutions (e.g. museums, galleries, etc.) - 1 person - 1% 5. Entities responsible for disaster and crisis risk management - 1 person - 1% 6. Environmental protection organizations -2 pers. - 3% 7. Economic/social partners, associations, SMEs - 2 pers. - 3%

<p>The level of awareness of the audience about the Poland-(Belarus)-Ukraine / Interreg and EU/Donor funded projects</p>	<div data-bbox="596 226 1378 667"> <p>KNOWLEDGE / UE PROGRAMS / PL (BY) UA EXPERIENCE</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Awareness Level</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>HIGH</td> <td>73%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MEDIUM</td> <td>27%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p>Assessment of the target group based on the level of awareness /engagement of the organisation in EU-funded projects in the region. *The rating is an estimate</p>	Awareness Level	Percentage	HIGH	73%	MEDIUM	27%
Awareness Level	Percentage						
HIGH	73%						
MEDIUM	27%						

Part 2.

What is Interreg

The Interreg Program is an important instrument in solving problems and overcoming common development challenges in Lubelskie region in the transnational, interregional and cross-border dimension. The PL- (BY) -UA is one of the largest programs financing joint, cross - border projects. As in previous editions, in the current financial perspective it responds to the needs of regional and local communities by co-financing infrastructure and investment ventures or micro - projects. Interreg plays an important role in building good neighbourly relations between the inhabitants of border areas, influences the increased integration of areas located on both sides of the border, but above all contributes to improving the quality of life in the eastern Poland and western Ukraine (in previous editions also Belarus).

At the consultation meeting on the future of the Program – strictly its next edition after 2027, a representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JS) of the Interreg NEXT Program familiarized all stakeholders with basic data on the Interreg PL- (BY) -UA Program. Stakeholders learned about the program area and the budget allocated for financing of projects. Priorities and allocation division as well as types of projects and partnership principles were discussed in detail. The presentation also included information on the main principles of program implementation and details of support opportunities from the Program in the current financial perspective 2021-2027. The JS representative assured the stakeholders of constant and full support of applicants at all stages of the process of creating, submitting, implementing and settling projects. In addition to the support of JS employees, beneficiaries have at their disposal the Program website, which contains all the necessary electronic tools, documents and information that provide them with access to current data and support in developing project ideas.

The next stage of the consultation meeting was a speech by Bogdan Kawałko - Director of the Department of Strategy and Development of the Marshal Office of Lubelskie Voivodeship, who presented how the Interreg initiative fits into the development policy of the Lubelskie. The director emphasized that the cross - border cooperation of the voivodeship has focused on common problems of neighboring partner regions since the first edition of the Program,

which is reflected in the natural connections between them, translating into the number of jointly implemented projects and long-term cooperation, including after the projects end. The huge interest in cross - border cooperation, both on the Polish and Ukrainian side, is self - evident in the vast number of applications, significantly exceeding the available allocation budget. The continuous interest in cooperation within the Program speaks for the need of not only its continuation, but also possible increase of the budgetary allocations in the future programming period after 2027.

In specifics, those projects that brought tangible benefits, primarily to local and regional communities were discussed.

Experience of the region

The localisation of the Lubelskie Voivodeship is of great importance from the point of view of cross - border cooperation activities. The Lubelskie is the only region that borders both Belarus and Ukraine. The analysis of the cooperation of all editions of the PBU/PL-UA Program shows that most stakeholders cooperated with Ukrainian partners from two border regions (Lviv and Volyn). The remaining Ukrainian partners came from regions located far from the border, while the cooperation with the partner from Belarus was conducted mainly by the beneficiaries of the Brest region. During the consultation meeting, the stakeholders emphasized how important cross-border cooperation is to them on the basis of joint projects implemented with PBU 2014-2020, including:

1. Joint infrastructure projects: Investments in road, transport and border infrastructure, including:

- expansion of border crossings and modernization of infrastructure accompanying border crossings;
 - ***Construction of the Road Border Crossing in Dołhobyczów – 4 Objects***

The construction of the *Dołhobyczów - Uhrynów* border- crossing started with the aim of filling the gap in the border infrastructure on the 139 km section of the Polish-Ukrainian border, improving the density and even placing of the crossings on the PL UA border as the external border of the European Union,

- The construction of roads and modernization of transport infrastructure improved communication on the Polish -Ukrainian -Belarusian border and significantly influenced regional development. The key, most anticipated investment in the eastern part of the Lubelskie region was the strategic project:
 - ***Extension of voivodeship road no. 812 on the Korolówka–Włodawa section.***

The investment also shortened the travel time between the planned *Zbereże-Adamczuki* road border crossing and the TEN-T network.

2. Joint cooperation projects in the field of education

- related to cooperation between universities and cultural exchange:
 - ***Invisible heritage: exchange and implementation of good practices in the access to cultural resources for the visually impaired and their participation in cultural life***

The aim of the project was to provide Lublin and Ivano-Frankivsk residents with visual impairments with real opportunities to access cultural heritage sites, as well as the resources of cultural institutions in both cities. The project was one of five finalists in the prestigious Regiostars competition organized by the European Commission.

- 3. Joint projects on safety and environmental protection,** which included actions to improve the quality of life, focusing on managing environmental risks and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, the development of renewable energy sources and energy saving.

– ***Strengthening the potential of Volunteer Fire Departments in rescuing road accident victims in Lublin and Volyn regions***

- a project worth over 712 thousand euros, implemented by the Association of Local Governments of the Euroregion "Bug". Its aim was to increase the level of safety on the Polish - Ukrainian border by supporting 32 communes of the Lubelskie Voivodeship and 15 Ukrainian gromadas. Communal Volunteer Fire Department units in the communes received support through certified training of firefighters and the purchase of specialist rescue equipment.

4. Joint projects in the area of health: projects that enable the exchange between medical facilities of experiences in the field of health care are worthy of attention, as well as joint actions to improve the quality of medical services and accessibility of health care for residents in border regions.

– ***Development of cross - border cooperation in cause that helps people with autism in the Polish - Belarusian borderland"***

On the Polish side, the "Shared world" association runs a kindergarten and a school for children with autism. As part of the project, two buildings were built: a building for a community self-help home that prepares for future work, also a building for training apartments with the possibility of transforming into a permanent residence home for adults with autism in the future. Furniture and computer equipment were purchased, which will be used for occupational therapy, preparing for work as well.

5. Promotion of local culture and tourism, including:

– ***B(L)ike Roztocze together in spite of borders***

within which the Roztocze Central Cycling Trail was adapted for cycling tourists by marking 297 km of the trail: – 187 km of the route was marked in Poland and 110 km in Ukraine, where wooden shelters, information boards and cyclist service points were built.

The meeting also featured examples from the health sector within the PL-UA 2021-2027 Program, including:

– ***Establishment of Cross-Border Preventive Research Centers in the Lublin and Volyn regions,***

where as part of the project, a Center for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion will be established in Lublin (PL) and a Center for Preventive Research and Rehabilitation in Luts'k. As part of the project, the premises in both facilities will be renovated, expanded and adapted to modern standards. Additionally, new equipment will be purchased to provide comprehensive preventive health care.

– ***Cross-border interaction for modern diagnostic and therapeutic methods in the Regional Hospitals of the Lublin Voivodeship and Zakarpattia***

The project aims to solve the problems of cardiovascular diseases and diseases requiring neurosurgical intervention, especially in the case of victims of war. As part of the project, hospitals in Lublin and Uzhhorod, among others, will purchase angiographic imaging systems for hybrid cardiovascular surgeries. Specialized training programs for medical personnel will allow for the diagnosis and treatment of war injuries. Professional cross-border cooperation between medical specialists in Poland and Ukraine through telemedicine tools will allow for the exchange of best practices, knowledge transfer and cooperation between hospitals.

In their statements, stakeholders referred to positive experiences from implementing small projects involving the local community. They emphasized the need to continue this form of cooperation, citing the following project as an example:

– **The Gothic Path: Joint Historical Reenactment and Virtual Journey to the Past**

The project assumed the development of a special village consisting in the creation of interactive and multimedia products, including 3D models. In the Goths' village, a joint scientific conference and a cross-border festival were organized. Similar activities were carried out in the museum in *Włodzimierz Wołyński*, supplemented with modern equipment products presenting the culture of the Goths, including those from *Masłomęcz*.

The program financed cross-border projects that clearly and visibly contributed to strengthening of the cross-border cooperation, improving the quality of life of residents and economic development of the region. Each activity aimed not only at developing infrastructure, but also at social and cultural integration, which contributed to deepening relations between the border regions of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus.

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 the location near the border an opportunity or a disadvantage?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The border location of the regions facilitates cultural exchange that integrates residents. • Local government officials from, among others, the <i>Terespol</i> Commune and the City of <i>Łęczna</i> described previous cooperation with Belarus as beneficial. The currently functioning security measures on the border with Belarus does not discourage residents from a cooperation. • The <i>Biała Podlaska</i> district has many years of experience in cooperation with Belarus and definitely sees Belarus in the future development perspective. • The border location can provide opportunities for economic development. • The consultation participants also expressed an opinion that the proximity of the border translates into a shorter route to partnerships and, at the same time, a greater motivation to establish cooperation.
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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"> - Social integration - Tourism development - Protection of environment - Joint cultural heritage - Border security <p>And the others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health services and healthy lifestyle promotion; - Responding to natural and human related threats and hazards - Cooperation between research / science / academic centres - Joint sports events - Road infrastructure - Strengthening local identity. <p>The possibility of prioritizing small projects over high-budget infrastructure projects was also discussed.</p>
<p>3. What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?</p>	<p>Over the course of more than 20 years of its operation on the Polish-(Belarusian)-Ukrainian border, the Cross-Border Cooperation Program has enabled an implementation of many valuable joint projects that have significantly influenced the development of partner regions.</p> <p>The consultation participants, mostly beneficiaries implementing cross-border projects, particularly appreciated the following areas within the Interreg Next PL-UA 21-27 Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare services were considered a priority in the current situation, although they were not the main theme of the meeting for the participants. Then - • trans - border actions in the field of road infrastructure and development of adequate acceleration procedures, • projects preparing Ukraine for EU membership, • joint efforts to protect the natural environment, • joint actions for security in form of cooperation between crucial services on both sides of the border <p>- were stressed.</p>

<p>4. What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relatively low level of digitalization in Ukraine makes cooperation with Ukrainian partners difficult. • Confirmed losses in the economic and tourism sectors incurred by local governments since the conflict prompted talks on possibility of temporal increase in the budget for infrastructure projects.
<p>5. What are major obstacles for a good cross-border cooperation in your area?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suspension of cooperation with Belarus during the current edition of the program may result in a poorer development of the program in the future. • Among the consultation participants, there were questions about the possibility of conditional inclusion of Belarusian regions in the "post-27" cooperation. • There was also an important quote: "Should local communities be punished with limiting their development opportunities by breaking off the good cooperation with Belarus?" • Another obvious obstacle to cooperation within the Program is the war in Ukraine. While it is impossible to predict the date of the end of the conflict from the observation of the political scene, Lubelskie Voivodeship, and especially its northern part, has suffered significant losses in terms of cooperation in recent years. • The Lubelskie region, as the most involved in direct aid for Ukrainian refugees and regions, may require a financial support. A good solution would be to introduce a compensation system for local governments.
<p>6. Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of projects aimed at institutions of higher education or opportunities to engage researchers who potentially have the greatest access to knowledge that should be used in the implementation of investment and soft projects were listed as barriers. A crucial aspect of the problem is that a researcher salary does not qualify as an eligible cost in the program.

<p>7. What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in the future Interreg?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation participants were in favor of restoring the priority of Tourism in the future Program perspective. • The attention was drawn to the fact that some Ukrainian regions, i.e. the Lviv region, despite the withdrawal of the priority due to urgent needs in the field of health and protection, were and still are willing to cooperate within the framework of the Tourism priority. Many Polish regions are very well prepared in the event of the restoration of the withdrawn priority. According to the representatives of local governments and institutions present at the consultations, the environmental protection priority naturally affects tourism, which is why it is worth developing both areas simultaneously. • Taken into account was the energy component, including a special emphasis on the development of energy communities as an initiative that can build socio-intellectual potential. • The topic of senior populace in the context of supporting actions for older people and social cohesion in the face of demographic change. • Another proposal was to standardize Interreg Next Program procedures with the other Interreg Programs.
<p>8. Is there a need for some infrastructure projects?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants agreed on the need of implementation of infrastructure projects with a regional dimension. However, it should be remembered that an implementation of large infrastructure projects may inhibit the collaboration of local communities within projects' cooperation. • It was pointed out that railway connections and border crossings are of strategic importance, the equipment of which involves significant costs, and therefore such projects should be financed using other means.

<p>9. What should be done to facilitate the work with your counterparts in another country (governance)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional/local governments of Ukraine are partially limited by the central supervision of the Government of Ukraine. Greater autonomy of Ukrainian local governments could have a positive impact on intensifying partnership contacts, also beyond the scheduled implementation of projects. • Introduction of small grants, "microfinancing" for uninterrupted contact with the Ukrainian side.
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Part 4.

Conclusions, other topics of discussion

During the consultations, the existing limitation of the digital functioning of the office administration in Ukraine was also indicated for the reason of its negative impact on fully effective partnership cooperation. The raising of the topic concluded with a plead for an increase in the lump sum amount for office and administration.

Another additional funds requested were those for the digitization of national heritage sites in Ukraine, a large part of which was destroyed as a result of war operations.

An important argument in the matter of increasing the Program budget was the substantive preparation of the responsible institutions and employees, which resulted in a large number of projects submitted in the last call in the Environment priority. A total of 132 applications were submitted that translated into a budget of approximately 230 million Euro. An advisable solution of such a disproportion of talent and the financing resources could be an increase of the Program budget to 1 billion Euro. Such a solution also entails strengthening the Ukrainian partner as the future European Union member, thanks to a possibility of experience gained within the Program.

In order to broaden the scope of impact of cross-border projects, a micro-grant fund for entrepreneurs was proposed, along with appropriate preparation of municipalities for this type of expanded cooperation.

It is also worth mentioning a beneficiary's voice speaking about the exchange rate risk incurred related to the fact of disproportion between the planned amount, the amount spent and the amount included in the financial report. Therefore, even such a small amount as 20 *groszy* (about EUR 0,05) can cause a significant disproportion in large projects' section. The Accounting Act was indicated as a possible base support.

The beneficiaries also indicated the strengths in the implementation of the Interreg NEXT Poland - Ukraine Program, including: a uniform project submission system, an efficient advance payment system and the swiftness, openness and transparency of the Joint Secretariat of the Program in terms of support provided to beneficiaries.

Overall assessment of the meeting by the organizer

During the consultation meeting, key problem areas for the region were identified and analyzed, as detailed in Parts 2 and 3 of the report. The participants also indicated potential areas of support that could be included in the Interreg Program after 2027 (Part 3).

Interesting quotes

- "Should we punish local communities by limiting their development opportunities by breaking off the existing good cooperation with Belarus?"
- "The negative impact of the war and the closure of the border on the regional economy is particularly visible in the northern part of the Lubelskie Voivodeship."
- "It is necessary to consider a temporary increase in the budget, especially in the context of infrastructure projects, also by preparing Ukraine on the path to joining the European Union, while giving it the opportunity to learn and gain experience."
- "Despite the war and other difficulties, cooperation between partners from Poland and Ukraine continues. The inhabitants of border areas should continually integrate with each other and small grants could serve this purpose."
- "I have very positive memories of our partners from the Belarusian side, both in terms of their level of substantive knowledge and the relationships we built."
- "After preparing a Tourism priority project with the Ukrainian region of Lutsk, due to the withdrawal of the priority we had to abandon the project altogether."

Questionnaires

As the last point of the consultation – 10-15 minutes – ask participants to complete the stakeholder questionnaire online, e.g. on smartphones/laptops, using the link (QR code) to the stakeholder questionnaire (3 language versions available).

Participants who completed the survey prior to the meeting can share their experiences and confirm whether the consultations allowed for more complete answers.

Attachments:

1. Agenda.
2. List of participants.