

Introduction

The **Interreg Euro-MED** is a European territorial cooperation programme on an international scale. Its general objective is defined by the word cooperation, based on a regional, transnational and European approach.

For the first time after two previous iterations of the Programme, Interreg Euro-MED is now extended up to **the Black sea regions: indeed**, a substantial enlargement was approved in this Programme cycle: two new countries (Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia), as well as **three new Spanish regions** (Castilla la Mancha, Extremadura, and Madrid) were added to the eligible zone.

Henceforth, the Interreg Euro-MED Programme now covers 25% of the EU's landmass, and is home to more than 140 million inhabitants.



Map courtesy of DG Regio



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Challenges

In its entirety, the Mediterranean region shows a lower average GDP per capita, a lower employment rate, and a lower innovative index than the EU average. Nevertheless, its innovative and development potential are huge with the existence of businesses and research clusters geared towards green and blue growth (environmental services, biotechnology, sustainable tourism, natural resources management, clean energy, marine sciences, fishing...). These clusters are nevertheless national in nature and progress could be made by inciting trans-national interaction and cooperation.

For the 2021-2027 period, the European Commission has set increasingly ambitious objectives by integrating environmental issues into all programmes of the EU. The target of the commission is **to devote 25% of EU spending to address climate objectives. As such, the environment is the leading theme for the current Interreg Euro-MED Programme**, which also assures a smooth transition from former axis 2 (low-carbon economy) and axis 3 (environment protection) of the 14-20 Interreg MED programme.

Although the global pandemic and widespread confinement have had a positive impact on the environment, the economic fallout was also devastating. While it is true that the economic crisis is not structural in nature, there is a dire need for economic support in order to recover from the crisis, especially in fragile and overexposed sectors such as tourism and cultural and creative industries.

Operational Missions

Following the cited challenges above, the principal objective of the programme consists of contributing to a transition towards a climate-neutral and sustainable society: fighting against the impact of global changes on Mediterranean resources, whilst ensuring a sustainable



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growth and the well-being of citizens. A strategic approach centered around four operational missions was adopted.

MISSION 1: STRENGTHENING AN INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

To combat the post-COVID economic crisis, it is imperative to find innovative solutions which remodels the current linear economy and **create pathways towards a circular economy** and a sustainable society. Research and innovation is essential for the management of natural resources by providing technological solutions in a sustainable fashion. This is particularly important in the current context of heightened environmental pressure and reduced biodiversity.

This is a **transversal mission**, aiming to support a wide variety of actions such as the transition towards a greener economy, the reduction of negative impacts stemming from climate change, the promotion of a collaborative economy and the improvement of green living space.

MISSION 2: PROTECTING, RESTORING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HERITAGE

This mission chiefly aims to attain the ambitious environmental objectives set by the EU, including those defined in the EU Green Deal.

In this perspective, the objective of the mission is to **continue the fight against the reduction of biodiversity** while reinforcing the actions aiming towards adaptation and climate resilience. The programme wishes to continue the work achieved during the last iteration of the programme, by supporting transnational actions aiming to develop an effective governance framework and to guarantee a sustainable management of natural resources.

With other missions, this mission aims to promote a societal model which is healthier for the environment and more viable for the economy via the protection, restoration and enhancement of **cultural and environmental heritage**.

MISSION 3: PROMOTING GREEN LIVING AREAS

The development and the sustainable management of living areas are paramount to the quality of life of Mediterranean inhabitants. In particular, it is urgent to **address the negative impacts**



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caused by urban sprawl which is hazardous towards human health and the environment. These are, but not limited to, air pollution, energy consumption, mobility, segregation and stratification, etc. On the other hand, as seen in the past few years, our living areas are becoming more and more vulnerable towards the effects of climate change, as cities are facing more and more severe climate phenomena.

The support for green living areas is complementary to the other missions in the programme as it tackles other issues inherent to the programme such as the transition towards green energy, energy efficiency, and the development of green living space.



MISSION 4: ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The tourism sector has been and always is a priority for the MED area. Due to the severe impact of the pandemic on the sector, there is an urgent need to stimulate its recovery as well as its sustainable development. The COVID-19 crisis doesn't only represent a major challenge but also a turning point to promote a permanent change in the industry, as well as its shift towards sustainable practices.

Taking into account the transnational nature of the programme, this mission would be tackled in a transversal manner thus permitting MED regions to ameliorate its social, economic and environmental quality. This mission aims to complement the other missions of the programme by placing a major component of the Mediterranean economy, Tourism, at the forefront of its transition towards a resilient and climate-neutral society.

Priorities

Priority 1: Smarter Mediterranean

This priority aims to reinforce the engagement in society and to increase the innovative potential of both the public and the private sector. The goal is to put in place solutions for a sustainable and greener economy in the Mediterranean by consolidating existing research networks into a competitive research ecosystem. This is done via engaging stakeholders and partners into a quadruple innovation helix framework.

Example of actions which are eligible under this priority

- Developing new and existing value chains, in cooperation within **transnational clusters** and promoting transnational coalitions (public-private), internationalisation and extraversion of SMEs.
- Applying best practices and management tools and **innovative solutions in the area of sustainable business development for SMEs**.
- Accelerating innovation and technology transfer, with particular focus on: **blue and green economy, agriculture, food production, fisheries and aquaculture, climate change, creative and cultural industries, renewable resources, smart manufacturing, transport, biodiversity, health and future digital technologies**.
- Promoting climate-friendly innovations, efficient industrial processes, new models of entrepreneurship, all oriented towards the creation of shared value and entrepreneurship in emerging sectors as well as those in transition.

- Changing practices in tourism by promoting existing and new solutions in an innovative manner: **smart tourism, management of tourist flows, etc.**
- Cooperating and coordinating institutional bodies, research bodies, businesses and civil societies for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of **smart specialisation strategies** for sustainable development (e.g. blue and green economy, industry manufacturing, renewable resources, transport, tourism, cultural and creative industries, biodiversity), developing skills for smart specialization (e.g. health, future digital technologies.)
- Strengthening transformative innovation policies.

Priority 2: Greener Mediterranean

This priority aims to create a greener environment for the MED area, supporting efforts directed towards energy transition and towards circular economy. Greener MED would promote a greener living space by improving natural resources management and by preventing and mitigating risks.

The priority is carried out through three specific objectives: supporting the transition towards a circular economy, preventing and mitigating risks and the transition towards green energy and green living areas, and finally improving natural resources management.

Example of actions which are eligible under this priority

In terms of the transition towards a circular economy

- Supporting and promoting the circularity and sustainability for products and production systems in sectors such as agriculture, food and fisheries, health and manufacturing.
- Supporting sustainable practices of waste reduction, prevention and transformation, in particular against the production of waste and the transformation of waste into resources.
- Supporting initiatives linking water, energy, and food.
- Supporting public authorities in the development and adoption of strategies to promote consumer awareness, covering domains such as tourism, creative and cultural industries sectors, etc., inciting their transition towards a circular economy.

In terms of the prevention, the mitigation of risks and the transition towards green energy and green living areas

- Preventing and mitigating natural and environmental risks, such as coastal erosion, rising sea level, protecting forests and mitigating forest fires, developing drought management plans as well as contingency plans for other extreme weather events.
- Preventing and mitigating risks associated with human activity, such as improving monitoring and governance systems focused on adaptation to climate change, promoting consumer engagement and awareness, developing and adopting strategies and practices to reduce the impact of tourism using emerging technologies.
- Raising awareness and promoting environmental culture, focused on changing behaviour in topics such as the use of natural resources, i.e. the creation of a water-saving culture amongst the population and amongst key players involved in tourism.
- Mobilising funds to put in place plans and solutions for climate change adaptation, resilience and energy transition in a fair and equitable manner.
- Supporting the deployment of alternative energies and reducing carbon footprint in daily life, such as promoting renovation which increases the energy efficiency of buildings or low-carbon mobility.

In terms of the improvement of natural resources management

- Consolidating the network of functional ecosystems, strengthening transnational links to more effectively protect fragile ecosystems and marine protected areas as well as improving existing cooperation infrastructures on various topics.
- Improving the management of natural ecosystems by facilitating co-management approaches for natural resources and by supporting public authorities to create a multi-stakeholder governance model in order to ensure effective and sustainable monitoring with other key actors.
- Restoring degraded ecosystems, especially water polluted by plastic waste.



Photo by Anne Van der Stegen, Regional Council of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Priority 3: Better Mediterranean Governance

Good governance constitutes the backbone of the capitalisation efforts for any results that would be obtained during the INTERREG Euro-MED Programme. A process coordinating other programmes and strategies within the Mediterranean area requires a Mediterranean vision as well as the establishment of strong governance structures.

This priority aims to **support the capitalization of thematic results** by establishing the conditions for synergy and coordination between Priority 1 and 2 projects, and by implementing integration strategies into local, regional, national and European policies.

The priority also aims to **support transnational coordination** between authorities of regional, national and European networks and between ETC management authorities, initiatives and strategies to improve public policies in the Mediterranean area.

Example of actions which are eligible under this priority

- Organising and disseminating information along thematic communities in order to facilitate the reuse of existing results generated by Interreg Euro-MED projects.
- Establishing a peer review process to consolidate knowledge generated by projects.
- Conducting analyses and inspiring connections between projects to identify relevant knowledge created by one project that can be harnessed and / or integrated and transferred to another project, creating synergies between them.
- Vitalising communities of interest around the mission of the program to promote the conditions necessary for the development of synergies between projects and facilitate the production and the updates of relevant knowledge.

- Conducting analyses to identify replicable and adaptable results for their transfer and integration into other programmes.
- Identifying key actors from local, regional, national and European level for the transfer and integration of results into policies and to animate networks to increase the public reach of the results.
- Organising training sessions and sharing experiences to increase the capacity of partners to enhance their results.
- Establishing favourable conditions for the transfer and integration of results into policies, notably between stakeholders and donor and recipient institutions.
- Creating and facilitating networks of recipient institutions to increase their capacity to integrate results into policies.
- Engage stakeholders actively in specific networks to stimulate coordination between local, regional, multi-sectoral and multi-level actors within Euro-MED.
- Constructing mechanisms to identify and analyse coordination opportunities within EURO-MED national policies and outside of the Euro-MED perimeter (including non-EU partners in the East and in the South).
- Promoting a Interreg Euro-MED vision.

Budget

For the 2021-2027 cycle, the final budget of the EUROMED programme has not yet been approved. The programme should be endowed with approximately **293 million Euro in total**. The financing of the programme stemming from the EU via Interreg funds (ERDF and IPA) should be **around 235 million Euros**. This is complemented by national contributions from member states participating in the programme, up to **about 60 million Euro**.

Due to the transnational set-up of the Programme, it is intended to support large-scale projects, involving the action of several states on a common issue. Nevertheless, smaller programmes could be **integrated into modular “territorial” or strategic projects** (i.e. studies, experiments, transfer of knowledge...), which would be co-financed. The interested public or private partners should take advantage of this possibility to find projects in the same priority to integrate themselves in the programme.



Photo from the European Commission

Calendar

The submission of the Programme for approval by the European Commission can only be done after the adoption of the implementing acts, in line with the European Regulations. They were adopted on 24th February 2022.

The first call for project proposals opened on 24th February 2022. This first call will be focused on Priority 3 of the Programme. A call for projects for Priorities 1 and 2 will be launched in during the summer 2022.

The kick-off event for the Interreg Euro-MED Programme 2021-2027 took place on 2nd **December 2021** in Lisbon and online ([check out the event here](#))