



Interreg
Euro-MED



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CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS AND CITIZENS

[Northern shore of the Mediterranean / Interreg Euro-MED Programme]

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INTRODUCTION

In response to the European Commission's request to consult stakeholders and citizens for post-2027 legislation, the Interreg Euro-MED Programme has initiated two comprehensive consultations to gather valuable insights from its area.

Consultation of stakeholders

Recognising the importance of a unified approach, **Interreg Euro-MED collaborated with five others transnational Interreg programmes: CENTRAL EUROPE, IPA ADRION, Alpine Space, NEXT MED and Sudoe**. This collaboration aimed to streamline the consultation process, making it more accessible and inclusive for stakeholders. Given that multiple transnational Interreg programmes overlap geographically, particularly in the Mediterranean region, **stakeholders often engage with several programmes simultaneously**. This joint approach ensured efficiency and coherence in the consultation process.

Additionally, specific questions were contributed by individual programmes, such as Interreg Euro-MED, to highlight the **participation of IPA countries**. The collective effort resulted in a unified survey hosted on the EU Survey platform.

Consultation of citizens

Interreg Euro-MED launched a separate consultation **targeting young people living in the Mediterranean**. This initiative aimed to gather fresh perspectives from a different public. The questionnaire was specifically designed to be concise and accessible, targeting students and IVY volunteers involved in MED projects who are familiar with the Interreg environment.

This harvesting **report** presents the **findings of these two extensive consultations**, summarising the insights and new ideas provided by respondents.

I. CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

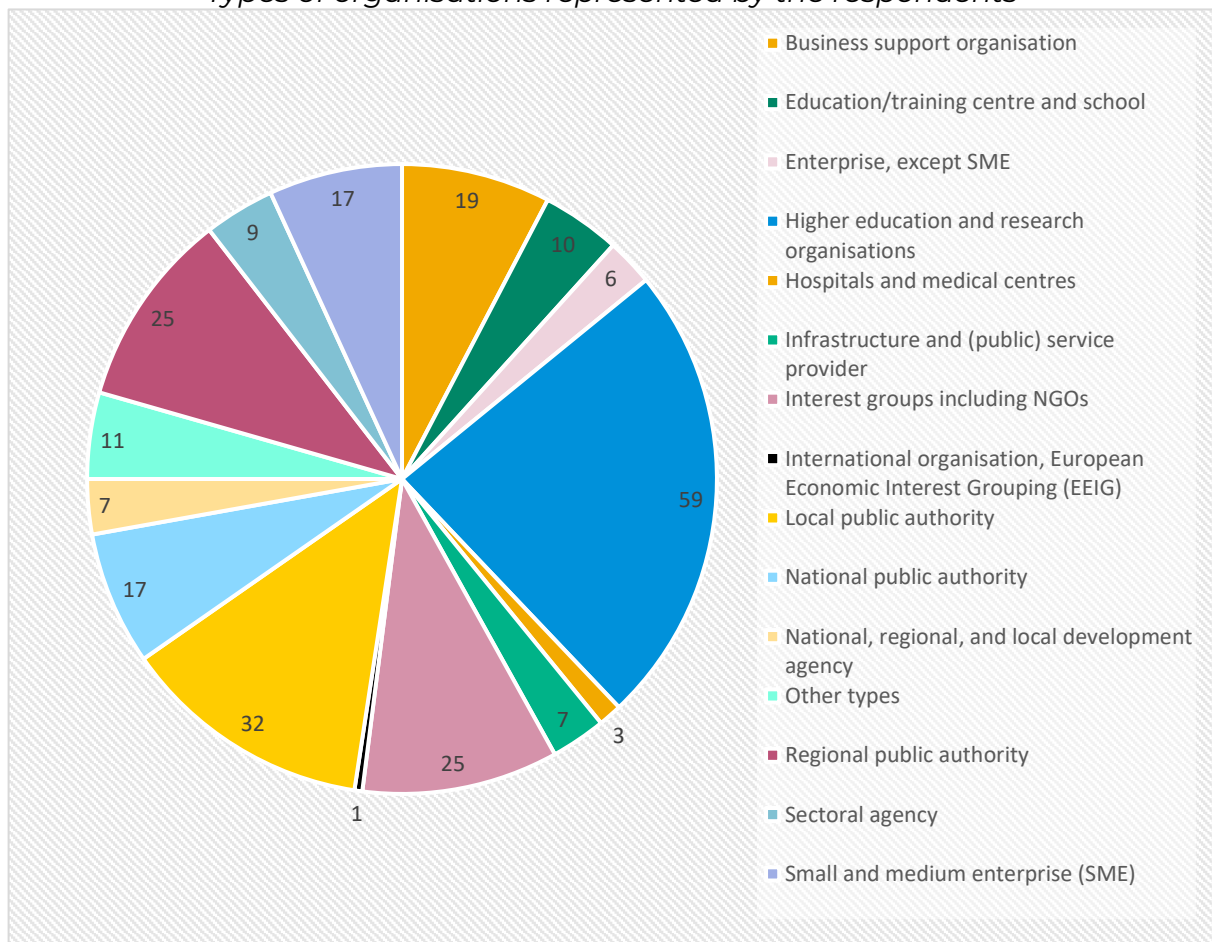
1.1. Main stakeholders consulted

The Transnational consultation received **711 replies** from different stakeholders. Please keep in mind that one respondent could answer and contribute for one or several programmes.

Interreg Euro-MED received **248 answers**.

Below are some data concerning the profile of our participants.

Types of organisations represented by the respondents



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Private sectors represent 27% of stakeholders (with 67 answers).
- Higher Education and research organisations, Education/training centre and schools, both represent 27,8% of answers.

- Public Authorities (rather local, regional, or national) represent almost 30% of participants.
- 70% of our respondent have a previous experience in Interreg programmes.

1.2. Methods of consultation

The survey was conducted from **April 24th to June 14th 2024**, with each Interreg programme independently ensuring accessibility to its stakeholders. Interreg Euro-MED launched a **targeted communication campaign**, , to effectively attract stakeholders.

On April 24th, several actions have been implemented:

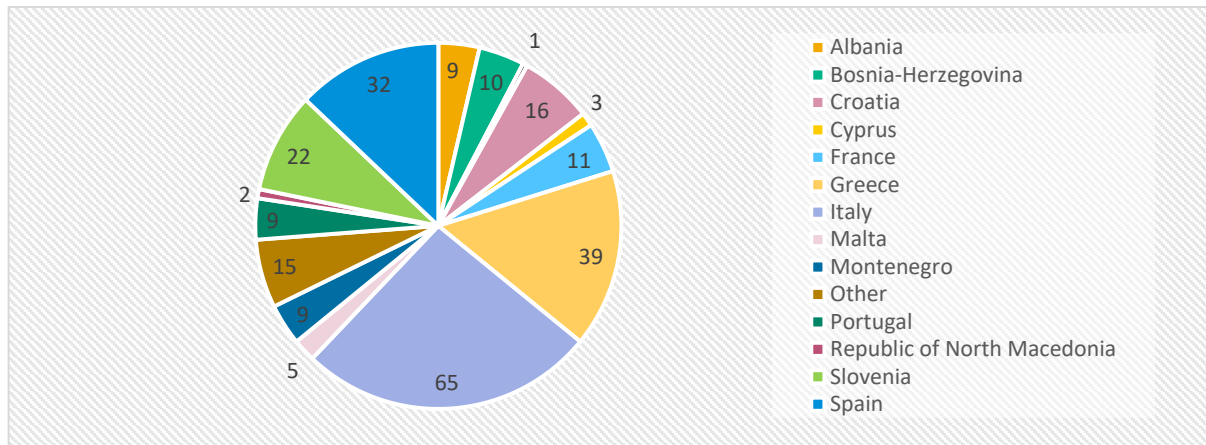
- Publication of **an article on our website** detailing the objectives of the consultation;
- Distribution of **a dedicated email** to stakeholders who had participated in previous calls or attended recent events, with a reminder sent on May 21st;
- Publication of **a message in Basecamp**, communication tool widely used by the Interreg Euro-MED project partners;
- Launch of the **first message in a series of four on social media** (Facebook, LinkedIn, and X), scheduled for April 24th, May 7th, May 22nd, and June 5th;
- **Distribution of a QR code** at two events: an online Q&A session on May 16th and an on-site event in Malta on June 11th, giving stakeholders easy access to the consultation.

ATTENDANCE

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE, which had access to the EU survey platform, coordinated the survey and regularly sent us batches of responses:

April 24 th	May 8 th	May 25 th	June 14 th
Launch of the consultation	Total responses: 295 Euro-MED: 115	Total responses: 422 Euro-MED: 196 (+51)	Total responses: 711 Euro-MED: 248 Survey closes.

Countries represented by the respondents for Interreg Euro-MED



1.3. Summary of the input on the key questions:

a. General questions

QUESTION 1: What is the key challenge in your area that should be addressed through transnational cooperation?

1. Adaptation to climate change and resilience:

- Elaborating strategies for more resilience and **managing risks related to climate change**.
- Addressing **protected areas and ecosystems**, biodiversity protection (endangered species and their habitats), preserving coastline and natural heritage.
- Advocating for **policy changes** to support climate adaptation.
- **Reducing greenhouse gas emissions** and overall pollution, investing on Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) and green infrastructure.

2. Ensure sustainability in all areas:

- Promoting **circular and blue economic practices**, achieving the **Green Deal** and a broader energy transition.
- Dealing with **water-related topics** (scarcity, drought, stress, and water management) and **food security** (ensuring soil quality, sustainable fishing practices, irrigation, and addressing overconsumption).
- Supporting **sustainable mobility**: urban and territorial planning, city traffic, GHG emissions and health impacts, and low-carbon transport.
- Implementing best practices to **tackle overtourism** and its negative impacts.

3. Reinforce capacity-building and governance:

- Sharing best practices, technology, experiences, strategies, and solutions.
- Finding expert partners and benefiting from their experiences and expertise, strengthening public administration capacities.
- Tending toward a **multi-stakeholder** and inclusive governance model
- Tending toward a **Mediterranean governance**: promoting policy convergence at a transnational level.

4. Tackle economic and social challenges:

- Enhancing the **digital infrastructure** of territories and public sectors, especially in rural areas.
- Fostering **job opportunities**, especially for highly educated individuals, and **promoting inclusive and sustainable growth**.
- Supporting local entrepreneurship and developing local economy, with a focus on SME competitiveness.

5. Foster innovation:

- Encouraging **innovative practices** to support resilience and the Green Deal.
- Enhancing cooperation in research and development, exploiting research outputs, and developing innovative strategies.
- Fostering **digital connectivity** among territories and ensuring interoperability between platforms.

QUESTION 2: What are key benefits that transnational cooperation offers to stakeholders like you?

1. New opportunities:

- Diversity of opportunities, including **access to funding**, collaboration with **new partners** (from different countries and sectors), and **development opportunities** for SMEs and territories (especially rural areas).
- Expanding partner's network and enriching their projects with diverse perspectives and expertise.
- Enhancing **visibility for smaller partners** such as SMEs and NGOs.
- Accelerating development and investment in territories, contributing to **closing gaps in economic development** and fostering sustainable growth.

2. Knowledge and innovation exchange:

- Sharing and adopting best practices, solutions, and knowledge, minimizing duplication of efforts, and maximizing efficiency in tackling common challenges.

- Facilitating transfer of practices and expertise, leveraging shared experiences, and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of projects and initiatives.
- Through concrete actions and pilots, transnational cooperation provides **access to innovative solutions and technologies** that may not be available domestically.
- **Mutual learning** and **capacity-building** among partners, enabling them to develop replicable models and sustainable solutions tailored to regional needs.

3. Collective impact and advocacy:

- **Amplifying project impact** through joint outputs and synergies, fostering a "community of knowledge" and better governance.
- Promoting innovative solutions and building trust across borders through **positive problem-solving approaches**.
- Enabling stakeholders to **advocate effectively for policy changes** and initiatives at **local, national, and EU levels**.
- Strengthening regional and international visibility, empowering stakeholders to address complex issues collaboratively for sustainable development.

QUESTION 3: Do you see any shortcomings in how your transnational cooperation efforts are currently supported? If yes, please explain.

1. Project partnerships:

- Difficulty in finding suitable partners for exchanging on project-relevant issues.
- **Need for new types of partners:** Involving CSOs and other societal actors is crucial for broader impact and community engagement.
- Addressing the dominance of certain types of organizations in grant applications is essential for **promoting diversity**.
- Recognising and mitigating barriers such as financial resources and administrative complexity is vital for participation of small organisations.
- Difficulties to involve the private sector.

2. Implementation of a project:

- **Heavy administrative procedures** to submit proposals, start the project once approved and undertake the financial and technical reporting process.
- **Lack of flexibility** to adapt to new circumstances, balancing administrative requirements with project outcomes is crucial for achieving meaningful impacts.

- Longer project durations could facilitate better integration of technical knowledge and sustainable outcomes.
- Shortcomings in the **establishment of real transnational and sustainable networks**.
- Need for clearer project selection criteria and more transparent feedback mechanisms.

3. Funding and budget issues:

- **More flexibility regarding budget allocation** while writing the proposal: a description like the requirements from **Horizon** could help and save time.
- **Slow reimbursement** processes affecting project continuity.
- Decreasing co-financing rate and decreasing Interreg fund since 2007-2013 affect **projects scalability and impact**.

4. Lack of support from national administrations:

- Differences in the way that political, administrative, and legal systems are organised on either side of borders.
- Dominance of national interests over collaborative objectives
- Misalignment between political agendas and project implementation.
- More support from national institutions needed, Contact Point should support a real **integration of related national incentives**.

5. Lack of coordination within an Interreg programme:

- Weak coordination at project and cluster levels, impacting results sharing.
- Lack of connection between innovation and policymakers, need to have a more **interdisciplinary approach**.

6. Challenges among Interreg programmes and with other EU-funded programmes:

- A better coordination (in terms of approach and rules) between Interreg programmes would help increase the impact of European territorial cooperation and give a better vision of the funding opportunities to the stakeholders.
- **Lack of coordination** between programmes whose geographics area are the Mediterranean.
- **Insufficient synergy** among European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and Regional Programmes

QUESTION 4: What are concrete obstacles that prevent stakeholders like you from cooperating transnationally with other partners?

1. Difficulty to find partners:

- **Lack of information and visibility:** not being known as a potential partner and not knowing other potential partners (their abilities and past experiences), especially in Western Balkans countries.
- Once partnerships are formed, it can **be challenging for newcomers to join**, which restricts diversity and fresh perspectives in projects. Experience appears as a necessity, but it is difficult for a newcomer to be involved for the first time in a project.

2. Lack of capacity to participate in projects

- Difficult to involve certain small organisations (NGOs and SME) because of the **low co-financing rate** and difficulties in accessing cash flow. **National co-financing** does not exist in most countries of the programme, and the 20% do make a difference when you're a small organisation, considering repayment is slow.
- Lack of human and institutional capacities: **more flexibility for staff cost** would help.

3. Rules and administrative barriers

- Excessive bureaucracy, complex rules, and heavy reporting requirements. Use of consultant often perceived as necessary because of this heavy bureaucracy.
- Differences in national legal frameworks
- Lack of strategic planning and short-sightedness from political leaders and local authorities hinder effective transnational cooperation: necessary to have a stronger political will and vision to optimize outcomes.

4. Project partnership challenges

- Differences in mentality, culture, and language can affect coordination and understanding among partners.
- **Reluctance among institutions** to exchange information and data impedes collaborative efforts. Establishing formal consultation procedures and promoting a collaborative mindset are critical.

QUESTION 5: Are there things that you would like to do through transnational Interreg programmes but currently you cannot?

1. Working on a wider range of priorities:

Regarding sustainability, social challenges, entrepreneurship, technology transfer, innovation, digitalization, culture, local development, research and technology, community participation...

2. Working on specific types of projects and actions:

- Deploy more **pilot** and demonstration projects.
- **Focus on strategic projects:** adapting guidelines and interventions to regional and area specificities.
- Exploiting results even after the formal end of the project
- Having concrete actions and specific actions **supporting the involvement of SMEs.**

3. Addressing largest investments in infrastructure and equipment

- Encouraging the development of small-scale infrastructure projects to **attract participation in Interreg projects**, linking these projects with other core activities, and combining strategies and action plans with investments.
- Providing **more opportunities for funding infrastructure projects**, with increased support for long-term sustainability projects and larger-scale infrastructure investments (such as NBS)
- Investing in small and medium infrastructure in key sectors such as education, health, and agriculture.

4. Having more flexibilities financially:

- **Cascade funding** for third parties (SMEs, municipalities) to support their involvement in transnational projects; **direct financial support** to SMEs; **subgrants** for startups and smaller NGOs and entities to develop specific actions within a project.
- Simplification of the budget options, using lump sums to reduce administrative burden.
- **Possibility to finance “public calls for funding” as a project activity**, supporting the creation of an investment fund for initiatives.

5. Encouraging the involvement of youth:

- Implementing **Labour mobility schemes for future employment** through skills transfer, specifying and determining a number of young people to be employed.
- Encouraging **trainee exchanges** (with an attention to young researchers, joint master’s programme), **dedicated programmes** that facilitate direct integration of academic coursework with transnational projects.

6. Having more common action at Mediterranean level:

- Introducing **links among Interreg programmes** to learn from one another, holding regular focus and study groups on common issues (for example, regarding SDGs goals on transnational level), Hazard and risk assessment at the Mediterranean level.
- **Harmonizing procedures** while keeping the particularities of each programme and their area.
- Facilitating mainstreaming of results into policies and encountering between “givers” and “takers” at the country and regional level.

QUESTION 6: What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in future Interreg transnational programmes?

Please describe how Interreg (or its role within Cohesion Policy) should change in the future to make transnational cooperation more effective.

1. Enhance citizen impact and participation:

- Encouraging **projects with a direct impact on community**, promoting citizen participation and democratic practices.
- Fostering **an inclusive approach**: genuine **bottom-up approach** with increased involvement, facilitating transnational mobility and addressing issues of social inclusion.
- Relying more on **Youth and Civil Society Engagement** and supporting NGOs working with local communities.
- Increasing visibility of Interreg funds and their impact, launching specific initiatives to involve and inform youth about Interreg programmes.

2. Enhance coordination across Interreg and other EU programmes:

- Stronger coordination at programme level aiming at avoiding replication and/or overlapping.
- Focusing on **strategic initiatives** and flagship projects for regional impact.
- Strengthening links between Interreg and ERDF mainstream programmes, taking Horizon as an example for simplification.
- Supporting a **future Mediterranean macro-region** and a **stronger role of Interreg programmes** within cohesion policy, more ambitious and independent from national bodies.

3. Simplified and flexible financial mechanisms:

- Launching **special call with small scale activities** and small budget for newcomer; **small scale people to people** initiative and funds for smaller projects.

- Implementing **pre-financing** options and simplifying **financial reporting** (simplification of the budget line), a bigger co-financing rate.
- Implementing cascade funding to support 3rd parties, **pre-payment schemes** to allow small project partners to enter projects.

4. Ensure sustainability of projects:

- Creating mechanism to foster **continuity and follow-up**, reusing results from previous programming periods,
- Defining and creating **innovative and efficient ways to capitalize** and mainstream project results and **ensure their real sustainability**.
- Establishing a robust monitoring mechanism for project outcomes.

5. More focus on innovation and technology for regional development

- Emphasizing **digital integration** and smart technologies, more support to projects that leverage digital solutions for regional development.
- Encouraging innovations in social and behavioural change, promote sustainable urban mobility and climate-friendly solutions.

6. Enhance flexibility for the projects:

- Throughout an **adaptative project framework**

QUESTION 7: Should the funding focus of transnational Interreg programmes change? What would be your transnational dream project?

For example: Should TN programme also finance larger investments and infrastructure projects? Or is the current focus on capacity-building and pilot investments fitting well?

Stakeholders present a range of nuanced views, balancing between maintaining current priorities and expanding to larger investments and infrastructure projects. Here are some arguments given:

The current funding focus of transnational cooperation...	
Should change (or be expanded):	Should not change:
<p>In favour of larger scale investments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift towards financing larger-scale investment and infrastructure projects would enhance the capacity of local authorities. 	<p>Current priorities must be kept:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current focus on capacity-building, best practices, and pilot investments effectively meets stakeholders needs; capacity building is essential before going for larger investments.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase visibility and appeal of Interreg among local communities and authorities. <p>To enhance local development impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding should be more flexible to include both infrastructures and small-scale investments in rural areas to better meet local needs. • Infrastructures are important, particularly in urban mobility and green initiatives. • Focus on fewer policy objectives in favour of more targeted actions. <p>To explore complementarity of fundings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging that when infrastructure is lacking, it is difficult to ensure the sustainability of project outputs and enhance the impact of capacity-building efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current focus appropriate for testing hypotheses and providing guidance for future local policy development. • Request to increase the focus on Interreg Euro-MED “transfer” type of projects and scale up successful innovations. <p>Infrastructures are national responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More suited to national-level funding, given the complexity and maintenance requirements involved. • Other EU programmes and funds address larger investments and infrastructure. <p>Geographical expansion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping current priorities but including more regions to benefit from cooperation
<p><u>Yes, but under strict conditions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong commitment from involved regions. • Implementation of stricter evaluation criteria for project selection. 	<p>Larger investments could be considered <u>if...:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnational funding increases. • There was a Mediterranean macro-region. • <u>through</u> a pilot phase to evaluate new initiatives before full implementation.

Dream projects from stakeholders can be divided into several categories based on their intended impact:

- **Governance projects:** for regional public authorities; ensuring a permanent network of stakeholders.
- **A civil servant exchange programme:** facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration among public servants across regions.

- A **transnational committee** that brings together civil society representatives to work collectively on shared priorities.
- **Urban sustainability projects:** including a network of cities implementing pilot projects for car-free city centers; promoting bicycle-friendly environments; and supporting infrastructural changes that reduce reliance on motor vehicles.
- **Projects with an impact on the Mediterranean area:** a joint permanent system **for monitoring the impact** of climate change in forest ecosystems in the Mediterranean region, a Mediterranean plan for the offshore wind power exploitation.

QUESTION 8: Do you have any additional ideas for facilitating cooperation with your counterparts in other countries in the future?

1. Regarding partnership:

- To create a **centralized platform for contact sharing** among participants.
- **Equal partner schemes** or determining a compulsory number of newcomers to ensure inclusion.
- Establishing a dedicated **“liaison office”** for facilitating and guiding SMEs through the process of forming transnational partnerships.

2. Knowledge sharing and exchange:

- Establishing a **centralized platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration**. It would provide resources, tools, and networking opportunities to help partners overcome administrative and cultural barriers.
- Creating a **Bilateral Mentorship programme** to provide mentorship from experienced projects to new ones, fostering long-term cooperation and sharing best practises.

3. Enhancing networking opportunities

- Organizing more **in-person events** and **decentralized meetings** to ensure participants from all regions.
- Organizing regular transnational networking events, **online and interactive**.
- Creating a **network of Interreg counterparts’ expert** in each Interreg region, area, and sector.

4. Architecture of the programme

- Creating a **coordination mechanism** to engage national and local institutions at programme level.
- **Strengthening the role of national contact points** (like Horizon) and improving **coordination with national governments** to facilitate integration of Interreg outputs locally.

- Establishing **more localized administrative offices** to improve governance and transparency.
- Include government figures to guarantee **full commitment from local authorities** (mayors, deputy mayors, their advisors, etc.)

5. Harmonization between Interreg rules:

- **Unifying Procedures between Interreg programmes** to avoid confusion and improve efficiency, including the use of the same reporting platform.
- A coordination centralised by INTERACT could reduce overlapping and improve efficiency.
- A **common "entrance site"** for all Interreg programmes can simplify the search for information and partners.

6. Simplified Processes and Reduced Bureaucracy

- Simplifying procedures by providing clear guidelines and setting simple constraints
- **Increasing funding flexibility:** use of the "Standardized Cost Option" and facilitating procurement issues.

7. Use of Digital Tools

- Developing **centralized digital platforms** for communication, document sharing, and project management.
- Organizing webinars and virtual workshops to share best practices and lessons learned.

b. Specific questions

QUESTION 9: In your opinion, what is the added value of cooperating between Western Balkans and EU partner countries in the context of Interreg?

1. It creates more opportunities for both EU and Western Balkans countries:

- EU countries expand partnerships; Western Balkans countries integrated into EU networks, emphasizing complementarities and shared goals, fostering a sense of belonging and cooperation.
- Sharing practices, knowledge, skills, and innovation to enhance efficiency.
- **Bridging development gaps**, providing progress and development opportunities in the region.
- Resulting in a **greater diversity** of perspectives, leading to **cross-cultural understanding** and involvement in cross-cutting actions throughout the Mediterranean basin.

2. It expands the programme objectives:

- Promoting **sustainable development** through Interreg projects.
- Addressing regional issues with a **shared approach**, leveraging geographical proximity for developing common strategies.
- Focusing on local level rather than national to address specific regional challenges effectively.

3. It paves the way for future integration of Western Balkans countries:

- Helping Western Balkans countries adopt **EU practices and policies**, laws, and regulations, shifting from outdated mentalities to modern European policies.
- **Promoting EU values** and creating a sense of belonging within the EU family (at project level)
- **Enhancing economic and social cohesion** within the EU and contributing to stronger, more cohesive, and prosperous European regions.
- **Promoting regional stability** and peace across borders (considering the regional context).

QUESTION 10: In case you are a potential partner from a Western Balkans country, what could facilitate your participation in future transnational Interreg projects?

1. Detailed partner profiles:

- A comprehensive presentation of potential Western Balkans organizations (detailing the project they were potentially involved in) on programme websites.
- Creating a **database of contacts** and existing projects.
- Organising more events (transnational info days and networking events) to get to know EU partners.

2. Simplified application process:

- Streamlining procedures with clear guidelines and templates to ease the application process.
- Providing pre-financing and flexible funding options, easy access to co-financing, faster reimbursement.
- Establishing clear guidelines and support systems that address the specific challenges faced by Western Balkans entities.

3. Capacity Building:

- Offering training programs to improve skills in project management, EU funding mechanisms, and financial reporting.

1.4. Interesting quotes

QUESTION 5: Are there things that you would like to do through transnational Interreg programmes but currently you cannot? If yes, please explain.

*“Yes, we would like that Interreg Programmes could **respond to regions’ needs and facilitate mainstreaming of results into policies.** [...]”*

We would like to be able to act as knowledge/information catalysers at regional level.

*In addition, it would be great if there would be **the possibility to acquire infrastructure** to implement pilot actions and strengthening transnational cooperation.”*

- Slovenian National public authority

→ Highlights the mixed views on Interreg's role, balancing its commitment to public policy goals with the potential for infrastructure development.

QUESTION 6: What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in future Interreg transnational programmes?

*“One of the most important novelties that could significantly enhance future Interreg transnational programmes is **the integration of a flexible, adaptive project framework.** This would allow **for real-time adjustments to projects as they evolve**, accommodating unforeseen challenges and opportunities that arise during implementation. [...]”*

- Greek interest group including NGO

→ Demonstrates the request for greater flexibility.

QUESTION 9: In your opinion, what is the added value of cooperating between Western Balkans and EU partner countries in the context of Interreg?

*“Cooperating between Western Balkans and EU partner countries [...] **strengthens diplomatic ties, fosters cultural exchange, and promotes peace and stability in the broader Mediterranean region,** contributing to the*



overarching goals of the Interreg program and fostering a sense of unity and collaboration across borders.”

- Maltese regional public authority

→ Reflects a strong consensus for cooperation with Western Balkans countries.

II. CONSULTATION OF CITIZENS

2.1. Main citizens consulted

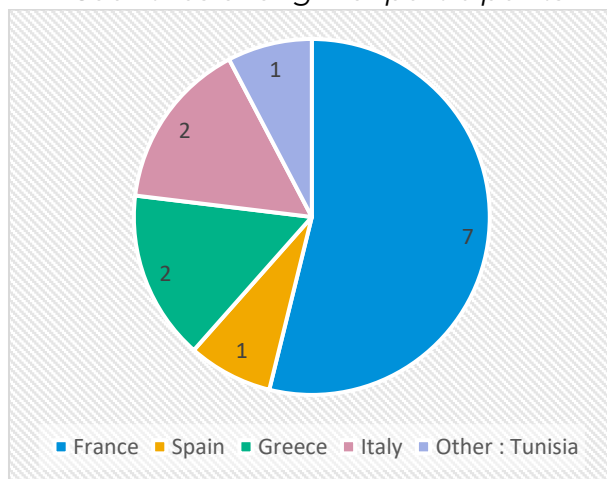
Interreg Euro-MED conducted an independent consultation of citizens.

A **tailored questionnaire** was developed internally and targeted at:

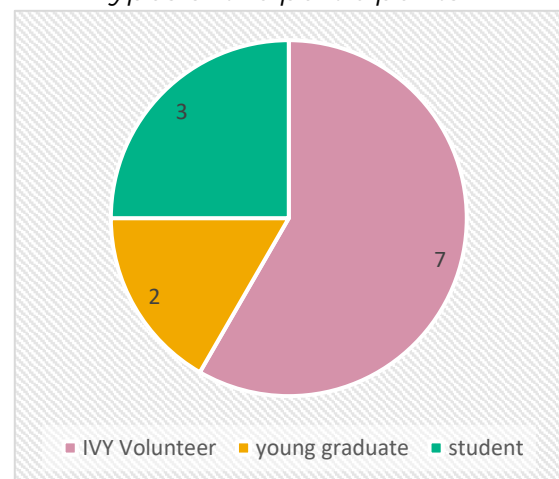
- **IVY volunteers** who are currently or were previously deployed on Interreg Euro-MED projects,
- **Young graduates or students** in European studies, or with knowledge of the Interreg environment or experience in co-financed projects.

We received **13 responses**. The respondents are aged **between 19 and 27**.

Countries of origin of participants



Types of the participants



Additional information:

- Most participants studied European and International Relations, but three of them studied specific themes related to the environment or social economy.

2.2. Methods of consultation

The questionnaire was made available on the programme website from April 24th 2024. The link to the questionnaire was sent to:

- The **Alumni center** of Aix-Marseille University who sent it to the students.
- **IVY Volunteers through AEBR**, association of European border Regions in charge of IVY volunteers.
- A member of the **Mediterranean Youth Council** to share it across the organisation.

- The **NCP network** because some National Authorities work with youth associations.

2.3. Summary of the input on the key questions

QUESTION 1: What makes living in the Mediterranean area an advantage or a disadvantage?

1. Advantages:

- **Pleasant living conditions:** sunny weather, presence of mountains, and the unique Mediterranean culture and cuisine highly appreciated.
- **Access to ports and waterways.**
- **Cultural Diversity:** proximity to different cultures and **a strong sense of community.**
- **Career opportunities** due to the region's diversity and similarities among countries.

2. Disadvantages:

- Region particularly vulnerable to **climate change effects** such as rising temperatures and droughts.
- **Economic Challenges:** over-reliance on tourism (overtourism), struggle with economic stability and youth face difficulties finding sustainable job opportunities.
- **Pollution in the Mediterranean Sea**, making it one of the most polluted seas in the world.
- Challenges related to tourist massification **impacting the cost of living.**

QUESTION 2: What are the main topics where European territorial cooperation (Interreg) is needed in the Mediterranean?

1. Sustainable development and Climate Change:

including biodiversity protection, environmental protection, resilience, transformation of agricultural and tourism practises, and renewable energy.

2. Social and Economic Development:

- **Tackling unemployment**, particularly youth unemployment, through better connections between universities and future employers; providing opportunities and support for youth.
- Fighting poverty and **developing rural areas.**
- **Social integration** and addressing migration issues.

- Encouraging social activities that foster community and cultural exchange.

3. Harmonizing organizational practices across the region to improve efficiency and collaboration.

QUESTION 3: What are the biggest difficulties for European territorial cooperation (Interreg) in the Mediterranean?

1. Differences among Mediterranean countries:

- Disparities in development and economic situations that causes different priorities.
- Different national and administrative rules between EU and third countries.

2. Cultural differences: language barriers, different opinions, lack of feeling of closeness across countries

3. Lack of knowledge on how to access the funding

4. Lack of national funding

6. Changes in European Policies

QUESTION 4: Can you name an Interreg project (and the programme it belongs to) that you find useful in the place where you live/work?

Out of 13 participants, 10 were able to identify an Interreg projects co-financed by those programmes:

A- Cross Border	B- Transnational	C-Interregional	D-outermost regions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - POCTEFA - Interreg Italy-Austria - Interreg Romania - Bulgaria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interreg Euro-MED (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interreg Europe (2) - NEXT MED (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interreg Indian Ocean

Most of the projects mentioned aim to address sustainability and climate resilience, (including renewable energy self-sufficiency, restoration of coastal areas and resilience toward climate change).

QUESTION 5: Have you heard about the Interreg Euro-MED programme? If yes, could you share an example of a project you find relevant for the future and explain why?

Out of 11 participants who know Interreg Euro-MED, 6 were able to identify specific projects, including:

	Name of the Project	Mission	Reason of relevance given
1.	BLUEMED	InterregMed	x
2.	CARBON FARMING MED	Interreg Euro-MED – Innovative Sustainable Economy Mission	Emphasizes how agriculture can capture carbon emissions and promote best practices for sustainability.
3.	ARTEMIS	Interreg Euro-MED – Natural Heritage	x
4.	URWANN, GARDEN, GREENMO	Interreg Euro-MED – Green Living Area Mission	Because they operate in meaningful fields linked to climate change, “the most pressing issue”
5.	TOURISMO	Interreg Euro-MED – Sustainable tourism	Supports sustainable practises and prevent damages on monuments
6.	x	Interreg Euro-MED – Sustainable tourism	Because tourism is a key sector in the Mediterranean

QUESTION 6: What would be the Interreg project of your dream? Feel free to share your ideas or suggestions you'd like to see in the future to be more involved!

Dream projects mentioned by citizens can be classified as follow:

1. Projects with other targets:

- A project focusing on **youth integration** that engage youth in creating strategies and solutions for climate change, while offering training and job opportunities to bridge the gap between education and labour market needs.
- A project focusing on migrant integration and skills development, recognizing migrants as a valuable resource for regional economic growth.
- A project with a work programme developed by small local associations, farmers, and citizens, addressing inclusivity, climate change, and international cooperation in a more accessible manner for these stakeholders.

2. Environment preservation:

- A project emphasizing environmental preservation through the **development of sustainable transport** and energy infrastructure in the region.
- A project similar to a Functional Area but on the Mediterranean coast.
- A project focusing on the restoration of historical buildings to meet modern climate standards.

- A project aiming the improvement of maritime spatial planning.
- A project supporting affordable and sustainable transportation options across Europe and the Mediterranean

3. Integration and Dialogue: A project between Greece and Turkey to improve dialogue

III. RECOMMANDATIONS FOR POST-27

3.1 Topics to be covered by Interreg

a. Current relevant topics

Several topics currently covered by Interreg are often mentioned by stakeholders as useful and relevant in the current context. These should be maintained and even **more extensively exploited**:

- Sustainability: including reforestation, energy efficiency, sustainable agricultural practices, water management, air quality, circular economy, marine resources protection, transport, and mobility, ...
- **Urban Regeneration:** Implement urban regeneration projects, including.
 - Brownfields regeneration, to redevelop previously used industrial sites.
 - Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ): Create traffic-free zones in city centres to reduce emissions.
 - Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN): Reduce car dependency in urban and peripheral areas.
- Rural Area Renewal: Supporting the regeneration of rural areas.
- Social topics: including social inclusion, employment awareness projects and culture.
- Technology and innovation

b. New emerging topics

In addition to the current topics, new areas of focus have emerged, which include:

- **Citizen engagement:** Encourage deeper community participation and give citizens a stronger voice in decision-making processes.
- More transversality:

IDEA: Promoting research, innovation, and the use of advanced technologies (AI and Industry 4.0) **for new approaches to environmental protection.**

IDEA: Broadening funding focus to support comprehensive, **multi-faceted projects** that merge research, education, and practical application.

- Targeted calls for researchers:

IDEA: Launching calls for ideas specifically targeted at young/mid-career researchers. Tailoring these calls for university-led consortia to boost academic collaboration across regions.

- Health and Sport: Addressing public health issues through targeted projects and promoting sports as a means of improving health and social inclusion.
- Integrated transport systems.
- Foster entrepreneurship through various initiatives and support mechanisms.

3.2 Geography of the programme

The transnational consultation has provided stakeholders with a global perspective on cooperation, particularly in the Mediterranean. Here are several ideas collected:

a. Common structures in the Mediterranean

IDEA: Establishing **observatories across the EU and MED area** to collect critical data. These observatories would support strategies to secure food production and influence policy decisions in the primary production sector.

IDEA: Co-creating **living labs** for sustainable development in the region.

b. More cooperation with other programmes

IDEA: Enhancing integration between programmes and projects focusing on macro themes within the Mediterranean Interreg programmes.

IDEA: holding regular **focus and study groups** on common issues at the programme level, facilitated through transnational events, with possibilities to apply to joint calls.

IDEA: Encouraging projects and cooperation between partnerships from different Interreg programmes. For example, a Euro Med partnership could collaborate with a partnership approved for another Interreg programme, serving as a **bridge project**.

IDEA: Enhancing coordination between transnational and cross-border programmes to address common regional problems.

c. Expanding the programmes' area

IDEA: Expanding the territory of the programmes **to foster higher levels of cooperation** and networking among main transport nodes and countries. This would attract more investments and activities, strengthen transport infrastructures, create synergies between environmental protection and growth, and reduce the reliance on traditional energy resources **through Interreg projects.**

IDEA: Connecting as many Mediterranean countries as possible.

IDEA: Launching **a special programme for the West Balkans region**, involving countries familiar with the culture and effective practices in Western Balkans countries.

d. Advocating for a macro-regional strategy

IDEA: Organizing regular events within the EU Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions to advocate for a macro-regional strategy.

3.3 Implementation of programmes / projects

a. Ensuring post-project continuity

IDEA: Implementing a **feedback mechanism** in EU transnational projects to inform legislative changes at EU level.

IDEA: Ensure successful projects receive **post-financing** to continue beyond initial funding periods.

IDEA: Funding networks or communities to **maintain connections** and activities of completed projects

IDEA: Compile a list of projects and their contributions by area and provide funds to continue their activities at the national and local levels, enhancing their long-term sustainability.

b. Entering partnership

IDEA: Establishing an **EU-backed rotation fund** to lend money to approved projects for the period from approval to repayment or implement **an advanced payment scheme** to enable NGOs and small associations to participate.

IDEA: Evaluating projects more favourably when they include partners who have never participated in an INTERREG project, to encourage newcomer participation.

IDEA: Establishing a **balance in partner types** and scopes of work, ensuring that expertise and areas of action are suitable for each case.

IDEA: Develop **an expression of interest platform**: Implement a system where projects can receive initial approval and then advertise on a platform to attract expressions of interest from local authorities and other stakeholders.

c. Flexible financial rules

IDEA: Make national co-financing compulsory.

IDEA: Incorporating **flexible funding mechanisms** in future programmes to adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities, including fast-track funding for pilot projects.

d. Platforms for partners

The idea of a common platform with partner details is widely requested by stakeholders. Here are the key suggestions:

IDEA: Creating a **dedicated platform for Civil Society Organizations** to connect institutional partners with beneficiaries and target groups.

IDEA: Developing a comprehensive **database of profiles** and roles of potential beneficiaries for each Interreg programme.

IDEA: Maintain a list of companies interested in participating in specific projects across programmes.

IDEA: Create **a transnational platform** for each Interreg programme with accurate profiles of actors and easy search functionalities. Develop the habit of sharing contacts of participants after each event.

IDEA: Use programme websites to support **matchmaking and networking** through tools like 3-minute pitches or webpages with partner descriptions.

IDEA: Include a **partner search option on programme websites** with contact information for all participants from both approved and not approved projects.

IDEA: Developing **collaborative platforms** to increase community participation, awareness, and network intensity, boosting territorial cohesion.

CONCLUSION

The scope of the two consultations differed significantly: the stakeholder consultation received 248 responses, while the citizen consultation had 13 participants. Nonetheless, **there is a convergence on certain themes**, particularly regarding **sustainable development**, including **climate change** and **sustainability**. These topics are of interest to a diverse range of people.