



European
Commission

TOOLKIT

Guide for consultations to shape the
future Interreg

INTERREG – Post-2027

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1. Background and Objectives

To prepare the post-2027 Interreg programmes, it is necessary to listen and to take into account the views of stakeholders and citizens. Indeed, they are those who are most concerned by the policy and know best the needs for territorial cooperation across the EU and along its external borders. Hence, in parallel to the consultations of the programmes themselves, they should be consulted before the Commission proposes the framework for post-2027.

The Interreg programmes are best placed to organise this consultation, collect and share the results. Programmes already have some experience in this respect (e.g. consultations to prepare the 2014-2020 Interreg). Therefore, the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) would like to ask Interreg programmes to consult stakeholders and citizens in their programme areas and report back on the results by end 2024.

DG REGIO is ready to assist programmes (e.g. providing guidance and advice, answering questions, participating in the consultations, extending the IVY initiative, etc.). As a starting point, this document presents a toolkit for the consultation of stakeholders and citizens. It is a practical guide for Interreg programmes providing core questions, a template for reporting back and possible consultation methods. All this can be adapted to the specific situation of each programme.

These are the main elements:

- ***Why is a consultation needed?***

Cooperation is not only about territories, it is also about people and stakeholders who live in those territories. It is them who are most concerned by our policy and its aim to improve their lives and well being. They are those who shall benefit from Interreg, who will implement projects and who know best what the needs are. Hence, we must know what they think and what they want. Only by getting the policy closer to people and places – and based on the experience of the current programming period – the Commission can present a strong and convincing narrative for a strong territorial cooperation in the future.

- ***Who should do the consultation?***

The consultation of stakeholders and citizens should be done by the Interreg programmes themselves. There is of course flexibility in who and how programmes consult (e.g. transnational programmes with large areas might find consulting citizens more difficult than much smaller cross-border programmes and might hence decide to focus on stakeholders).

There will also be a separate consultation of the Interreg programmes' authorities coordinated throughout 2024 by Interact / TESIM.

- ***Who should be consulted?***

The Interreg programmes would consult stakeholders and citizens living in the territory covered by their programmes. The stakeholders could be: cross-border bodies (EGTCs, Euroregions, etc.), regional and local authorities (cities, rural areas, etc.), public services

(transport operators, hospitals, waste collectors, universities, etc.), enterprises (e.g. chamber of commerce), NGOs, civil society organisations, and of course current and former beneficiaries. In citizens consultations there should be a specific focus on young people (individuals or/and associations).

Please note that some specific and pan European stakeholders would be consulted separately by DG REGIO (for example: UfM, CEMR, CRPM, Eurocities, AER, EU macro and sea-basin strategies, WestMed, MOT, AEBR, CESCO, etc.).

- ***What should be done?***

Consultations should be organised, using various methods most adapted to the target groups. Results should be collected and then shared with DG REGIO.

- ***How should it be done?***

Consultations can take different forms. In general programme authorities already have some experience as they consulted their constituencies when drafting their 2021-2027 programmes. What is important is to get the main ideas (including those 'out of the box') from a wide range of diverse stakeholders and citizens. In section 4 of the toolkit, possible methods are proposed.

For stakeholders and citizens whose knowledge of Interreg is limited or non-existent, it is important to precede the consultation (questions) with a simple explanation of how the relevant territorial cooperation programme works in practice.

- ***When should it happen?***

The consultations shall start in the beginning of 2024 and be finalised by the end of the year (with the reports shared with DG REGIO). This timing is important as the first discussions to prepare the Commission's proposals for post-2027 will start already in mid-2025. A major harvesting event will take place at the beginning of 2025 (still to be confirmed by DG REGIO).

- ***Who will pay for it?***

The costs should be limited, but where there are some (venue, catering, professional moderator, travel, persons to work on the consultation, etc.) they should be covered by the Interreg programmes, under technical assistance (as part of the planned preparation of the next period) or ISO1.

- ***Is any other support / assistance available?***

DG REGIO (e.g. the desk-officer of each programme) and Interact / TESIM will provide additional support (e.g. explanations, webinars, answers to questions, a discussion forum, etc.). DG REGIO's Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) initiative (i.e. the placement of young volunteers in programmes and / or projects) should be used by programmes to support their consultation efforts. IVYs also have a small budget to organise citizens engagement events themselves. The IVY managers at the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) stand ready to help programmes identify young volunteers in the coming weeks and months. The IVY specifications are being adapted to make the recruitment process easier in the context of this major consultation exercise.

2. List of Key Questions

Whilst it is clear that every programme will have specific questions linked to its geographical coverage or the type of threats and opportunities its programme area offers, DG REGIO would like to receive input from all programmes on a set of key questions for stakeholders and another set for citizens (where such consultations are deemed appropriate). This way, DG REGIO will be able to aggregate reactions and form a comprehensive picture of main trends among the Interreg community. Therefore, we ask programmes to make sure that the following sets of questions are used as a minimum during the consultation process.

Key questions to stakeholders

This is for all Interreg programmes (all strands). Stakeholders should answer for their area of activity / interest.

1. Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage [this question can be adapted for strands B, C and D] ?

Examples: an advantage because there are more choices to get a job; a disadvantage as things can get complicated like public transport or setting up a business; etc.

2. Where is the biggest potential for territorial cooperation in your area?

Examples: plastic pollution of the sea; lack of public transport across borders; being easily employed in the neighbouring country; protecting the Alps; joining forces for tourism; etc.

3. What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?

Examples: joint natural park; shared health services; exchange of practices between cities on urban poverty; cross-border industry cluster; effective clusters or networks, etc.

4. What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved?

Examples: energy connectivity; different nature preservation practices in a shared sea or river basin; little exchanges between islands facing the same issues; etc.

5. What are the major obstacles for a good cooperation in your area?

Examples: low level of economic development, distance from metropolitan areas; little willingness to cooperate; little knowledge of Interreg programmes, incompatible levels of competences at regional or local level, different languages; different levels of salary etc.

6. Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?

Examples: to build a joint waste water treatment plant; to have more the possibilities to support SMEs; to finance operating costs; to invest in major infrastructure; too complex rules; not enough budget; inadequate geography; excessive controls; overlaps with other EU programmes; too few calls for proposals; usual same beneficiaries; etc.

7. What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in the future Interreg?

Examples: simpler procedures, more beneficiaries, more innovative projects, more people to people, more infrastructure.

8. Is there a need for some infrastructure projects?

Examples: no, infrastructures are already there; yes, we need a joint sport centre instead of none or two; yes, we need to improve navigability on international rivers; yes, we need to have the missing transport links (rail and roads, bridges,...); yes, climate adaptation and risk-management measures should be done together; etc.

9. What should be done to facilitate the work with your counterparts in another country (governance)?

Examples: the decisions need to be taken more quickly and better coordinated; we need more coordination involving central government; we need a dedicated institution; etc.

10. What would be the cooperation project of your dreams?

Examples: nature protection, a joint hospital to have less transport to get to the nearest one; a network of cities that suffer from excessive tourism; a bridge over the river; a common school, etc.

10 Key questions to citizens

This is primarily for Interreg programmes of strands A and D (for those programmes of strands B and C wishing to consult citizens, questions may be adapted). Citizens should answer based on their own personal experience. Before asking / discussing these questions, it might be necessary to explain what Interreg is (objectives, programmes, topics, territory, examples, etc.).

1. Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?

Examples: an advantage because there are more choices to get a job; a disadvantage as things can get complicated like simply public transport; etc.

2. In the place where you live, what are the main topics where cooperation is needed?

Examples: reducing pollution in a river; attracting tourists; networking research and enterprises to innovate; establishing energy communities; etc.

3. Can you name an Interreg project that you find useful in the place where you live?

Examples: a project about cleaning a river; a cycle path; a job fair; a joint cultural centre; a bus link; the protection of the sturgeon in the Danube; etc.

4. In your daily life, what are the biggest difficulties for (cross-border and transnational) cooperation?

Examples: not the same language; a mountain range preventing easy exchanges; negative stereotypes; little potential for cooperation due to demographic decline; being in an island; non-Schengen borders, etc.

5. What would be the cooperation project of your dreams?

Examples: nature protection, a joint hospital to have less transport to get to the nearest one; a network of European cities that suffer from excessive tourism; a bridge over the river; a common school, etc.

3. What to include in Harvesting Reports

By “Harvesting Reports”, DG REGIO means reports on the content of the consultations, outlining in summary formats the key elements that emerged from the various consultations. To facilitate the reporting work of the programmes, and to enable DG REGIO to aggregate feedback, a template is provided below which programmes should use.

The reports should be sent to: regio-d2-cross-border-cooperation@ec.europa.eu (with the subject: “Post-2027 consultation – [name of your programme]” by 31 December 2024.

In principle, there will be one report per Interreg programme.

Each report should be in English.

The length should be approximately 15-20 pages.

A comprehensive summary of consultation outcomes will be made public by DG REGIO in the first half of 2025.

It is crucial that the harvesting reports contain useful input. The information should be clear and concise. Hence, use plain language and avoid generalities (such as: “we need to cooperate”, “we need more money”, “cooperation is difficult”, etc.). New idea or ‘out of the box’ proposals are welcome.

The following template may be copied / pasted into a new word document:

[Region / Programme]

1 Consultation of stakeholders

1.1 Main stakeholders consulted

[1/2 page; List of key stakeholders consulted (name of the entities); If they are too numerous, their type is enough (e.g. universities, NGOs in the field of XXX, etc.)]

1.2 Methods of consultation

[1/2 page; Consultation methods used (events, citizens forum, internet, etc.); Attendance / response rate; An indication of the timeline would be useful;]

1.3 Summary of the input on the key questions

[5 pages; The key questions are those presented in section 2; There should be an answer to each of them; There might also be additional points (e.g. if further questions were asked)]

1.4 Interesting quotes

[1 page; In the answers by stakeholders – orally or in writing – there might be some interesting statements that make the point clearly; Mention the name and organisation]

2 Consultation of citizens

2.1 Main citizens consulted

[1/2 page; Types of citizens consulted (country, age, individual / association); Specific mention of young people and – if relevant in the area – marginalised communities]

2.2 Methods of consultation

[1/2 page; Consultation methods used (events, citizens forum, internet, etc.); Attendance / response rate; An indication of the timeline would be useful;]

2.3 Summary of the input on the key questions

[5 pages; The key questions are those presented in section 3; There should be an answer to each of them; There might also be additional points (e.g. if further questions were asked)]

2.4 Interesting quotes

[1 page; In the answers by citizens – orally or in writing – there might be some interesting statements that make the point clearly; Mention first name, age and country]

3 Recommendations for post-2027

[3 pages; Main recommendations; It should include new ideas and ‘out of the box’ ones; The recommendations should at least cover the following 3 issues: (a) topics to be covered by Interreg; (b) geography of programmes; and (c) implementation of programmes / projects]

4. Methodology for Consultation

To get an interesting input from the consultations, the choice of method is important:

- The simplest is an **online consultation**. It has many benefits: it is quick, easy and cheap; it reaches a wide-range of audience; and it offers the possibility for everyone to contribute. However, many will not be interested (as it is not stimulating) and the quality of answers may be poor (standard answers without reflection).
- The most effective is a **consultation in-person through small groups**. These small groups can be existing ones (citizens' panels) or *ad hoc* ones established specifically for this consultation. The key success factors are: getting the right people (the exchanges need to be attractive for the participants), organising the discussion (using a good moderator) and making everybody confident to speak-out.

Interreg programmes are encouraged to use a mix of methods with at least a few consultations in-person.

Some principles:

- Consultations should use **plain language**, especially for citizens⁽¹⁾.
- For the citizens, **young people** should always be included.
- Ideally, the **language** used should be the local one.

Main methods of consultations (examples are under the links):

- **Participatory workshops and discussion groups** (in-person). Either these are established specifically or the consultation takes place in the margins of an existing event (concert, students' fair, hiking groups, congress, etc.). In any case, people should find an interest to join the discussion and the participatory workshops / discussion groups should be attractive (drinks, reduced tickets to an event, etc.). Examples:
 - [“We make transition!”](#) (Interreg Baltic Sea Region): co-creation in the areas of consumption, mobility, energy and social life
 - [Dolomiti live project on democracy](#) (CLLD IT-AT)
 - [SiForReg](#) (Interreg Central Baltic): social innovation for refugees

⁽¹⁾ For example: (1) economy (instead of “competitiveness”); (2) jobs (instead of “employment”); (3) education; (4) innovation (instead of “smart specialisation”); (5) digital; (6) nature (instead of “green infrastructure” and “biodiversity”); (7) climate change; (8) energy; (9) transport (instead of “mobility”); (10) social (instead of “social economy, “social enterprises”, “inclusion”, etc.); (11) elderly, Roma, Sami, migrants, poor, disabled, etc. (instead of “silver age”, “marginalised communities”, “persons with a non-European background”, “deprived communities”); (11) culture; (12) tourism; (13) health; (14) specific territories (maritime, urban, islands, mountains, etc.); (15) specific groups (young, marginalised communities, migrants, etc.); (16) actions with people (instead of “people-to-people”); (17) migration; (18) demography; etc..

- **Citizens' assembly** (small group of randomly selected citizens; in-person). This happens more and more in big cities. Examples:
 - [Citizens Assembly in Brussels](#)
 - [Climate assembly UK](#)
 - [EmPaci](#) (Interreg Baltic Sea): Participatory budgeting
- **Open discussion platforms** (online). These discussion can be guided through a document setting the scene. Example:
 - [Czech – Bavarian cooperation](#) (through www.make.org)
- **Questionnaires and surveys** (online). Examples:
 - [La vendemmia delle idee \(CLLD in IT\)](#)
 - [DG REGIO survey on cross-border cooperation with IPA-countries](#)
 - www.surveymonkey.com.

Guidance documents:

- As very useful guidance document is the “[OECD guidelines for citizen participation processes](#)” (including tips & tricks).
- Another source of inspiration is the “[Citizen participation playbook for Emilia-Romagna region](#)” (funded by the Commission is done with the OECD).
- [Citizen Engagement Navigator by the Commission](#).

Annex – More details on consultation methodologies

4.1. Key stakeholders and groups

For each type of Interreg programme, the tables below suggest stakeholders that should be consulted as far as possible. The list is non-exhaustive ⁽²⁾. Programmes themselves will identify their stakeholders, but they should go beyond their list of beneficiaries and reach out to be as inclusive as possible:

Suggested stakeholders for all programmes (including for external borders)

- Regional (including regional development agencies), local, urban and other public authorities
- Higher educational institutions, schools, training, research centres
- Transport operators
- Health organisations
- Employment and labour market organisations
- Bodies in charge of disaster and crisis risk management
- Economic and social partners, e.g. chambers of commerce and business associations, trade unions, etc
- Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- Bodies representing civil society, notably NGOs
- Bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, **working on** gender equality and non-discrimination, migrants, Roma people, etc.
- Young people and youth organisations

Specific stakeholders to be considered by Interreg strands

Interreg A (Cross-border cooperation)	Interreg B (Transnational cooperation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-border local communities and bodies at different scales: Cross-border regions, cross-border territories etc. • EGTCs and equivalent bodies, such as Euroregions and Eurodistricts, acting at a cross-border scale • Organisations representing or working with cross-border workers (e.g. Frontaliers Grand Est, Euradria, MOSA, Øresund Direkt, etc.) • Cross-border information centers (e.g. Infobest, GrensInfoPunt) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Macro Regional Strategies (via their technical secretariats) • Transnational organisations, cooperation committees (e.g. Benelux, Nordic Council, Visegrad group, Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, Union of Baltic Cities, Geographical Commissions of the CPMR, etc.)

⁽²⁾ The "[OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#)" and the "[European Code of conduct on partnership](#)" provide useful guidance which will be used in the Toolkit.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant cross-border public services (e.g. the Cerdanya cross-border hospital) • Euroinstitutes or equivalent (e.g. TEIN network) • Cross-border cooperation committees (e.g. the Franco-German cross-border committee of the Aachen Treaty) • Cross-Border Universities (e.g. EUCOR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EGTCs and equivalent bodies acting at transnational scale (e.g. EGTC Banat-Triplex Confinium) |
|--|---|

Interreg D (Cooperation in the Outermost Regions)

As these programmes are either of a cross-border or transnational nature, the relative recommendations apply there, but stakeholders specific to Outermost regions' cooperation should also be involved, including regional organizations (such as Caricom or Cariforum in the Caribbean area).

4.2. Main steps to follow

Proposed methodologies for consultation, specific for each stakeholder group if relevant. ⁽³⁾

1. What is the purpose of the consultation?

Here the goal is to foster an open debate about what developments and changes the Interreg community and citizens in relevant geographical areas are calling for to shape the future of cross-border areas and macro-regions they live in.

2. What type of input is needed?

A clear understanding of the expected outcomes or results of the participation process (broad opinions, ideas and proposals, etc.) is needed to define the desired inputs and contributions from citizens and stakeholders and the impact they will have on final decisions.

3. Whom to ask?

Different types of groups can be involved in a participation process, such as a broad group of citizens from diverse backgrounds, a representative group of citizens, a particular community based on geography or other demographic characteristics, as well as stakeholders, ranging from non-governmental organisations to businesses or academia. ⁽⁴⁾

⁽³⁾ A helpful checklist can be found on pages 85-91 of the "[OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#)".

⁽⁴⁾ When gathering results from consultations, and thus when designing the questions asked, it should be clear whether answers are given on the behalf of an individual, or a representative of an organization.

In the context of Interreg, stakeholders, project beneficiaries, and local citizens in Interreg areas are relevant groups to involve. Joint secretariats, monitoring committees, and potential beneficiaries form the “inner circles” of the relevant community, while citizens form a larger outer circle.

4. How to collect input?

Different methods are best suited for different goals and for different target groups (see “Types of Methods for Consultations”). When gathering data, feedback and responses can be collected in qualitative and quantitative form. Both must be evaluated accordingly and in relation to one another to best understand the results. Once the results are collected, they can be summarised and discussed to shape policy.

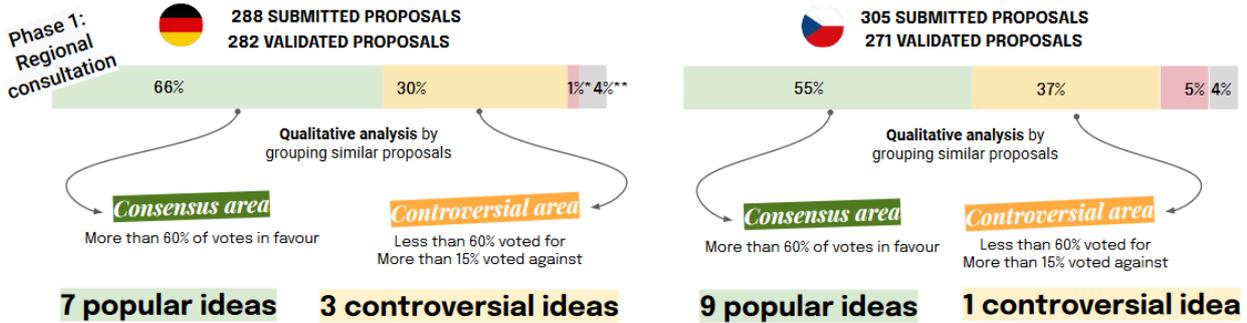
IMPORTANT

All too often, consultations in the field of European Territorial Cooperation do not specify their target precisely enough. Both stakeholders of Interreg programmes in the narrow sense (partners, potential beneficiaries, etc.) and citizens (everyday people, often far removed from the Interreg sphere) answer questionnaires that are not well tailored to them. This is why defining the target precisely is an essential initial step of consultation.

EXAMPLE

An online consultation regarding cross-border youth participation between Germany and the Czech Republic (see the [presentation of the results](#)) created by [Make.org](#) had both quantitative and qualitative results.

Analysis of the proposals and votes



Theme 5: Energy and environment



Idea 1: Promoting environmental and energy cooperation

13 proposals 3,585 votes

Popular idea shared by both countries



This idea was present in both national consultations in the first phase.

Participants from both countries agree on the need to promote renewable energy and sustainable practices to combat climate change. Proposals include: working together to produce renewable energy, developing a joint energy policy quickly, launching joint environmental projects, building new green buildings, investing more in research for new energy storage technologies, taking sustainability and long-term improvement of the environment into account in state management, switching to greener forms of energy extraction, discussing ideological solutions for energy transformation, and increasing public education on ecology and energy management. Overall, these proposals are aimed at creating a greater focus on the environment and promoting more sustainable practices.



5. How to promote the consultation?

Public communication can help at every step of the way – from recruiting citizens, to ensuring the transparency of the process, to extending the benefits of learning about a specific policy issue to the broader public. Constant, clear, and understandable communication that uses plain language is most effective.

In a cross-border context, where in most cases two languages co-exist, consultation of citizens requires specific attention.

EXAMPLE

GAL Carso, the Local Action Group of Karst on the border between Italy and Slovenia, ran a call for ideas to shape their 2020 development strategy. Their [short questionnaire](#) was publicly available in both Italian and Slovenian so as to be accessible for individuals from both sides of the border.

6. How to involve participants?

Once the problem, expected results, target groups, and methods are decided upon, the execution of the consultation can unfold. In order to ensure a successful process, the “Tips & Tricks” in the following section should be taken into account.

7. How to understand results?

The inputs received as part of the participatory process should be given careful and respectful consideration and used as stipulated in the beginning – with clear justifications if any inputs or recommendations are not used or implemented. Communicating to participants about the status of their inputs and the ultimate outcome of their participation helps to close the feedback loop.

EXAMPLE

Closing the feedback loop was a priority following the first Citizens’ jury in Cantabria, a project supported by the OECD and DG REGIO (click [here](#) for more information). As is the case for this example, providing feedback is especially important not only for participants who would like to know how their input is used, but also for the broader public as well.

In the close Interreg community, stakeholders generally know the life cycle of programming, and are used to be involved at certain steps (e.g. when a programme is drafted). They will easily understand the post-2027 perspective,

while citizens may find it more challenging to comprehend and will require updates throughout the process to avoid visibility of their input only after 2027. For stakeholders, it will be necessary to explain that the consultation has a real “prospective” dimension – it aims at foreseeing challenges and policy responses for 2028-2034, and not only a technical dimension as they are used to.

8. Have we reached our goal?

Through open and honest evaluation, the quality and neutrality of a participatory process can be measured and demonstrated to the broader public. Evaluation also creates an opportunity for learning by providing evidence and lessons for public authorities and practitioners about what went well, and what did not. This is particularly important in Interreg context, where domestic actors need to be convinced of cooperation's added value.

9. How to make a long-lasting difference?

A shift from ad hoc participation processes to a culture of participation can be supported by embedding institutionalised participation mechanisms, multiplying opportunities for citizens to exercise their democratic "muscles" beyond participation, and protecting a vibrant civic space. This extends the benefits of the process beyond the moment of consultation. In cross border and transnational contexts, participation should contribute to develop a cross border and European citizenship. Programmes can contribute to it through involving citizens to their key steps (calls for projects etc...).

4.3. Types of Methods for Consultations

Type of Method	<i>Questionnaires and Surveys</i>
Brief description	Questionnaires are easily adaptable and diffusible, making them suitable for a wide range of target groups. The recruitment of participants can be undertaken through local newspapers and social media, among other forms, to ensure representativity. In terms of content, more technical and specific questions may be reserved for stakeholders who are already familiar with the subject, while more general and opinion-based questions may be better suited for citizens and the general public.
How to use	Survey questions can have open responses for people to freely express their thoughts, or have multiple choice answers, preference rankings, etc. Questionnaires should be kept as short and concise as possible to increase the likelihood of respondents answering every question and can include a short identification section to gather personal data such as age or nationality. It is suggested to publish questionnaires online, but printed copies, or the possibility of downloading questionnaires as a PDF, answering them manually, and mailing them or emailing a scanned copy, can help bridge the digital divide and gather responses from a wider range of people.
How to analyse results	<p>The types of questions asked shape the type of data collected. Multiply choice, drop-down menu, and ranking questions produce quantitative data, which can be summarized in numbers and graphs (e.g. showing the most popular responses chosen). For drop-down menu questions regarding nationality, for example, bar graphs showing the number of respondents sorted by nationality is useful in better understanding the population consulted. In the case of multiple nationalities, it can be helpful to show this as a separate category. When analysing the data collected, identification information can be helpful in finding trends among specific populations, such as different perceptions on each side of a given border.</p> <p>Free responses with text, on the other hand, provide qualitative data. While ideally reading every response would give the best overview of the data collected, this can sometimes prove to be too time consuming. Tools such as Word Clouds, that summarize the most common words in responses, are a quick way to identify reoccurring ideas or themes. Some questionnaire platforms such as SurveyMonkey include text response analysis solutions, such as Word Clouds or sentiment analysis (identifying positive, negative, and neutral words) to directly integrate this approach.</p>
Best suited for	General public, local citizens, stakeholders
Example(s)	DG REGIO Survey on Cross-Border-Cooperation with IPA- countries aimed to collect information on obstacles and solutions for cross-border cooperation between EU Member States and Enlargement Countries. The survey was accessible online with a deadline for replies.
Recommendations	Highly recommended - For the open debate desired by the initiative, a general questionnaire serves as a valuable starting point. This can be disseminated to the general public but can also be tailored to a limited audience.

Type of Method	<i>Participatory workshops and discussion groups</i>
Brief description	Discussion groups can often serve as helpful complements to other methods, such as comment periods, to further discussion. This format is especially well suited for participants with preestablished knowledge of a subject. This format can take place both online or in person.
Best suited for	Experts and stakeholders, EGTC's and equivalent bodies
How to use	Workshops can be designed in many creative ways. Usually, working in small groups (5-10 people) helps ensure that everyone's voice is heard. Discussions focus on a specific prompt or questions to answer collectively (e.g. "Design your ideal Interreg project"), which can also focus on specific themes depending on the group. Workshops can also be designed through activities, such as sorting themes into categories, serious games, or simulation activities. Having a written or visual summary of discussions, usually accompanied by a short informal presentation by each group to explain their work, is important to facilitate the analysis of results.
How to analyse results	Results of workshops and discussion groups tend to be qualitative. Identifying common themes, suggestions, and relevant action plans is thus done by reviewing what participants produce during sessions. Common threads can be highlighted and ideas can be summarized in reports, and should be followed by recommendations based on the results.
Example(s)	At the end of 2022, the MOT facilitated workshops to create action plans and foster discussion between actors on both sides of the Franco-Italian border. In support of the "Conférence des Hautes Vallées" (CHAV), an associative structure with Franco-Italian governance, discussions also focused on the evaluation of the actions carried out via the PITer ⁽⁵⁾ CoeurAlp during the ALCOTRA 14-20 programme and the study of the evolution, role, structuring and current governance of the CHAV. Experts and stakeholders were split into small discussion groups based on their fields of interest and then worked together to fill worksheets detailing the ideas they came up with. At the end of the session, reflections were shared with the collective group.
Recommendations	Highly recommended, as well for citizens in cross border territories, and for stakeholders at the programme scale – EGTCs and equivalent bodies can not only participate in discussions, but can help gather interested parties and actors in their relevant areas.

(⁵) Integrated territorial plan.

Type of Method	<i>Open discussion platforms</i>
Brief description	Open discussion platforms are helpful in gaging public opinion on various subjects. This method allows the public to pitch their own ideas and give feedback on proposals from other participants. Commenting on submissions fosters exchange and can show how popular or controversial an idea is, which can then be used to guide policy proposals and priorities. It is important to note that this method is largely qualitative, and should therefore be used in combination with other, more quantitative, methods.
How to use	Open discussion platforms mainly take place online as they consist of an ongoing process. Participants answer a broad prompt (e.g. “How can we build a strong and sustainable Europe together?”) and submit their ideas. Then, respondents can comment on other proposals and exchange opinions.
How to analyse results	Proposals gathered from open discussion platforms can be sorted thematically to present ideas more concisely. Comments and reactions to proposals can help show which ideas are generally agreed or disagreed upon, especially if the platform allows for reactions (i.e. thumbs up or thumbs down) and which are the most controversial, which can help guide policy decisions.
Best suited for	General public, local citizens
Example(s)	<p>Make.org, as used in the online consultation regarding cross-border youth participation between Germany and the Czech Republic (see page 10 of the presentation of the results).</p> <p>Make.org allows users to submit an idea and react to other submissions. These submissions can then be sorted by how popular (most likes) and controversial (close to equal amount of likes and dislikes) they have.</p>
Recommendations	Recommended for both citizens and stakeholders at the programme scale – Open discussion platforms could be used for the present consultation process or beyond it. Creating a permanent citizen discussion on cooperation could help boost involvement in the long term.

Type of Method	<i>Comment Periods</i>
Brief description	<p>Comment periods allow for participants to submit ideas and/or provide feedback on proposed policy. While stakeholders may have more knowledge about the topic at hand, citizens can provide valuable insight into the needs and wants of the general public.</p> <p>This method requires to have a proposal “on the table”, which is not the case in the context of the present consultation. Nevertheless, in some cases, an existing document might be proposed for discussion.</p>
How to use	<p>The document to be discussed needs to be available for all participants in a comment period. Like with open discussion platforms, this format is best used online as it takes place over an extended period of time. Responses should be open ended and allow participants to express themselves freely.</p>
How to analyse results	<p>Reoccurring recommendations, comments, and suggested changes should be prioritized when reviewing the proposed document. These can be summarized in a report once the comment period is closed, along with suggested next steps.</p>
Best suited for	<p>General public, local citizens, stakeholders</p>
Example(s)	<p>A comment period was organised to receive feedback on the draft of the Interreg NEXT programme Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027. The consultation was carried out from May 16th to June 6th 2022 and was published on official websites of the Programme institutions (with online forms for submitting comments). Results were summarized thematically (i.e. by type of remark) and all comments were considered by the Joint Programming Committee in the preparation of the final version of the document. Almost 80% of remarks influenced the Programme document – 56% were directly included and 23% were partly included. 21% of remarks, for various reasons, were rejected and did not influence the final wording of the Programme.</p>
Recommendations	<p>Optional – While helpful, comment periods tend to be most useful after proposals have been made, usually in later stages of the process.</p>

Type of Method	<i>Citizens' Assemblies</i>
Brief description	Citizens' assemblies, also known as citizens' juries, typically involve a small group of randomly selected citizens that are representative of a larger demographic. These citizens are asked to contemplate and discuss a given policy issue and then provide recommendations on how to best address it. More concretely, the jury are usually given a specific question to answer or a clearly defined scope, and provide a report at the end of the process detailing their recommendations. While they are often used in direct relation to local or national governments, similar methods can also apply for organisations and programmes.
How to use	Citizens should be randomly selected and receive invitations to participate in advance. Since not all will want to participate, it is recommended to invite a larger number of people than that desired for the final assembly. Citizen should be clearly informed about the process (time, structure, location, organizer, etc.) beforehand. During the assembly, free discussion should be encouraged. A structured blank report should be given to the group to fill out collectively.
How to analyse results	Citizens' assemblies usually produce a recommendations report. Reoccurring recommendations should be considered priorities when reviewing results.
Best suited for	Local citizens
Example(s)	The Franco-German dialogue on cross-border cooperation during COVID-19 brought together 40 citizens (20 French and 20 German) of all ages, from all socio-professional backgrounds, and living more or less close to the border. They deliberated in plenary and in sub-groups, and received information from speakers specialised in various fields of cross-border cooperation. At the end of four sessions, the participants submitted recommendations to the public authorities to improve Franco-German cooperation in the cross-border region and make this cooperation more resilient to health crises.
Recommendations	Optional – more appropriate for a local cross border community.

4.4 Tips & Tricks

Examples and “tips and tricks” of existing participatory consultation models. ⁽⁶⁾



1. What is the timeline?

Realistic schedules for consultations should be drafted when planning the process. Ideally, these should be as detailed as possible, and include preparatory steps, such as booking venues and preparing informational material, as well as steps to implement the process (how long in-person sessions will be, how much time in between etc.).



2. Have ALL resources been considered?

Resources needed for participatory consultation processes go beyond time and money. *Human resources* are needed to organise in-person and online events to facilitate discussions and ensure necessary outputs are produced. *Financial resources* are needed to pay for a variety of necessary tools, including but not limited to staff, digital platforms, translation of material. *Technical resources* are needed not only to design and run online consultations and communications, but also to gather and analyse the inputs and outputs of the process. *Institutional resources* are also key, as organisations, companies, and advisors can be helpful in reaching target audiences. Identifying all these types of resources will help ensure the success and the limits of the consultation process.



3. How does the audience think?

Consider the incentives of the target population to participate in the consultation. Understanding the perspective of the people you are trying to reach can help design outreach to best attract them, by providing a short explanation of how participating is relevant to them and the people around them, for example. This is also important to consider when designing the consultation in terms of accessibility (time needed, distance to be travelled, language used, etc.).



4. Is the participatory process adequately aligned with the decision-making process?

Consider the results of the consultation in their form and their content (survey answers, deliberative reports, etc.) and plan on how these results will be used as inputs to shape policy (will they inspire changes? Inform decisions? Be directly implemented?). This should be done at the initial stages of the consultation process as it also impacts the timeline of the project and how questions are phrased (Are participants being asked to provide broad opinions? Well informed recommendations? Action plans? Feedback on existing concepts?).The

⁽⁶⁾ Some tips in this list are drawn from the [OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#). More details can be found on pages 56-59 of the Guidelines.

timeline of the consultation should be considered throughout the process, and it may be helpful to link different steps. For example, if a citizens' discussion group is planned to be held, voluntary participation can be signalled at the end of a questionnaire for citizens ("Would you be interested in participating in a discussion group with other citizens on this topic?"). This was done by the Basel Trinational Eurodistrict when organising a participatory process as part of the development of its 2030 strategy.

EXAMPLE

For its [Civic Dialogue](#), the Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel organised online questionnaires regarding important issues and project ideas. As part of an online citizens' dialogue, residents of the region discussed topics of their own choosing and made proposals for the future of cross-border cooperation.

While the questionnaire gathered opinions and ideas, the discussion groups allowed to make concrete proposals, thus fulfilling the aim of facilitating discussion between citizens on cross-border topics as well as the process of integrating citizen feedback into the operational and strategic planning of structures of cross border cooperation.



5. At what moment is the consultation taking place?

The moment of the consultation is important to consider. On the one hand, it should be explained that the Commission, within the life cycle of the Cohesion policy, needs to collect ideas at this step (in 2024), so as to later formulate new policy proposals for after 2027. On the other hand, issues linked with Interreg have a specific political dimension, and their public discussion should not stop at this moment. Programmes should be encouraged to maintain involvement of citizens and stakeholders afterwards.



6. What is the big picture?

Socio-political context of the consultation can influence multiple aspects of how the process unfolds, from timing to presentation. Links can be drawn between the public consultation and wider political processes or events, such as the European elections of Spring 2024 or the successive presidencies of the EU (see the [consultation done by Germany and the Czech Republic](#), at the moment of the Czech presidency of EU).

It is also important to note that the context of consultations is often unique depending on location. Cross-border areas also present their own unique contexts that should be taken into account.

Preliminary research regarding the context in which consultations take place, including opportunities and threats in given areas, can therefore be helpful in ensuring the effectiveness of outreach strategies.

It is recommended to take into consideration the opinions of the different domestic components, so as to be able to measure convergences and divergences across borders. On the other hand, the inherent aim of Interreg is to contribute to develop cross-border and transnational integrated spaces, where cross-border and European citizens would share a common destiny. It is therefore also important that consultations take into consideration the opinion of the whole space or network as such.



7. Is communication efficient?

Communicating about the public consultation process helps recruit participants, bring the issue to the attention of a larger public, and ensure the transparency of the process. To communicate effectively, the following “TAP” must be taken into account:

- **T**ransparency: Clear and open communication helps make participants feel more valued and trusting. This includes clearly stating the purpose of the consultation and how participants’ input will be used, as well as providing feedback and follow-ups throughout the process. In the case of open discussions, transparency can also take the form of guidelines that must be respected.
- **A**ccessibility: Consistent, clear, and understandable communication that uses plain language is most effective. It is also important to consider adapting content for various publics (e.g. translation of documents for different language speakers). The linguistic element is especially relevant in cross-border contexts. It is also important to tailor questions and phrasing to the specific public being addressed.
- **P**rivacy: Ensuring the privacy and security of participants is important, as it can encourage them not only to participate in the study, but also to respond honestly and openly. This can take the form of allowing their name, age, and other sensitive information to be masked in public forums.

EXAMPLE

The Fit for Future Platform

- *Transparent:* Comments are public, guidelines and usage of submissions are clearly presented, and the removal of comments is publicly justified.
- *Accessible:* Entries can be submitted in various languages.
- *Private:* Users can choose to remain anonymous in their submissions



8. Is open dialogue encouraged?

To come up with innovative ideas, participants should be able to freely express themselves. It is therefore important to implement a bottom-up approach to encourage open dialogue rather than a top-down approach that imposes preformulated ideas on participants. This includes being open to contradicting ideas and disagreements.

EXAMPLE

L'espace citoyen de l'Europe

(Lille – Kortrijk – Tournai Eurometropolis)

- Three times a year, the “Citizens' Space for Europe” brings together 30 citizens (10 French, 10 Walloons, and 10 Flemings) and 10 people from the European institutions (elected representatives, senior civil servants, operational staff, etc.) for a constructive exchange of ideas.
- Participants are chosen at random among volunteers and the meetings are bilingual and translated.
- Both citizens and representatives of European institutions can sign up to participate on the [Eurometropolis's website](#) through a bilingual sign-up sheet.
- Innovative methods of interaction and dialogue are encouraged and no subjects are off the table!
- The Eurometropolis hosts a variety of similar events to foster open exchange (see below).

Examples of events hosted by the Lille – Kortrijk – Tournai Eurometropolis:

- Eurometropolis party
- Coffee breaks
- Citizens' Space discussions



9. Who can help?



Multiple structures and/or authorities can help in consultations not only by participating themselves and sharing their insights, but also by helping contacting specific groups that may otherwise be difficult to reach. Collaborating with EGTCs or authorities involved in programmes or macroregions is thus highly recommended, especially to expand the scope consultations beyond Interreg. It is also worth noting that some structures already have consulted citizens for their own purposes and thus may already have systems in place to best reach them.

