



EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

European territorial cooperation (ETC) is the goal of cohesion policy that aims to solve problems across borders and to jointly develop the potential of diverse territories. Cooperation actions are supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through three key components: cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation.

LEGAL BASIS

Article 178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of 17 December 2013.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

ETC has been a part of cohesion policy since 1990. For the programming period 2014-2020, for the first time in the history of European cohesion policy, a specific regulation was adopted covering ETC actions supported by the ERDF. This practice has been continued in the 2021-2027 period.

ETC is the goal of cohesion policy, which is designed to solve problems that transcend national borders and require a common solution, and to jointly develop the potential of diverse territories.

The 2021-2027 period marks the further evolution of interregional cooperation (Interreg), with reinforced cooperation with partner countries through the Interreg instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) and [Interreg NEXT](#), and the integration of a dedicated strand for cooperation between the [EU outermost regions](#) and their neighbouring countries.

EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION IN THE 2021-2027 PERIOD

In 2021, the EU entered a new multiannual programming period. The rules for ETC in the 2021-2027 period were established in a [regulation](#) on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg Regulation). The primary objectives for fostering territorial cooperation during this period are enhancing collaborative governance and ensuring the safety and security of Europe. In the 2021-2027 period, ETC consists of four components (strands):

- Cross-border cooperation (Interreg strand A) supports cooperation between NUTS (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) 3 regions from at least two different



Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. It aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union.

- Transnational cooperation (Interreg strand B) allows for cooperation over larger transnational territories or around sea basins and involves national, regional and local programme partners in Member States, but, in some programmes, also in non-EU countries (such as Iceland and Lichtenstein), Enlargement and Neighbourhood partner countries and overseas countries and territories (OCTs), with a view to achieving a higher degree of territorial integration. Transnational cooperation implemented by the outermost regions falls under a separate strand. Interreg strand B supports a wide range of project investments related to innovation and the green and digital transition.
- Interregional cooperation (Interreg strand C) works at pan-European level, covering all EU Member States and partner states. It builds networks to develop good practice and facilitate the exchange and transfer of the experience of successful regions. It is a tool to strengthen cohesion and overcome present and future challenges.
- Cooperation in the outermost regions (Interreg strand D) has the objective of allowing the outermost regions to cooperate with their neighbouring countries and territories in the most efficient and simple way. To this end, the Interreg Regulation offers the possibility of managing both external funds and the ERDF under the same set of rules. Consequently, under strand D, calls for proposals can be launched for combined funding through the ERDF and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, which is the EU's main instrument for international partnerships on sustainable development, climate change, democracy, governance, human rights, peace and security in EU neighbouring countries.

The regulation also establishes cooperation outside the EU that promotes sustainable development and good neighbourly relations between EU Member States and Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries and between the EU's outermost regions and their neighbours. The EU external cooperation programmes cover the EU and its neighbouring countries and contribute to the objectives of three EU policies: cohesion policy, enlargement policy and neighbourhood policy. The regulation also covers cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey via the IPA, lays down preparations for future membership of the Union and supports the accession process. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and in line with the EU's restrictive measures, the Commission has suspended cooperation with Russia and Belarus under the European Neighbourhood Instrument cross-border cooperation programmes and their participation in the 2021-2027 Interreg NEXT programmes.

During the 2021-2027 programming period, around EUR 8 billion (in 2018 prices, meaning in terms of the value of the currency in 2018) is being allocated to ETC. These resources are allocated as follows:



1. 72.2% (i.e. a total of EUR 5 812 790 000) for land and maritime cross-border cooperation;
2. 18.2% (i.e. a total of EUR 1 466 000 000) for transnational cooperation;
3. 6.1% (i.e. a total of EUR 490 000 000) for interregional cooperation;
4. 3.5% (i.e. a total of EUR 281 210 000) for outermost regions' cooperation.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

As the Interreg Regulation falls under the ordinary legislative procedure, the European Parliament was able to co-decide on its content on an equal footing with the Council. When negotiating the cohesion policy for the 2021-2027 period, the European Parliament advocated a larger budget for the ETC programmes and simpler rules and procedures. The European Parliament actively promoted stronger support for small and people-to-people projects, as well as an increased focus on climate and social issues. The European Parliament also paid special attention to the specific challenges of outermost regions.

In 2018, the Commission proposed a regulation on a European cross-border mechanism to address legal and administrative obstacles in cross-border contexts. It proposed a voluntary mechanism for neighbouring EU land borders to facilitate joint projects by allowing the application of laws from neighbouring Member States when necessary. The proposal is currently on hold at Council level due to concerns raised by Member States about its voluntary nature, administrative burden, recognition of existing mechanisms, and constitutional law implications. In its [resolution](#) of 14 September 2023, Parliament called on the Commission to revise the proposal to strike a balance between the two co-legislators. Given recent trends in intra-EU labour mobility and the need to tackle demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges, Parliament believes that the Union should intensify efforts to address cross-border obstacles. The resolution calls for a streamlined coordination framework, including cross-border coordination points, to efficiently remove legal and administrative barriers, duplication and unnecessary administrative burden.

For more information on this topic, please see the website of the [Committee on Regional Development](#).

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