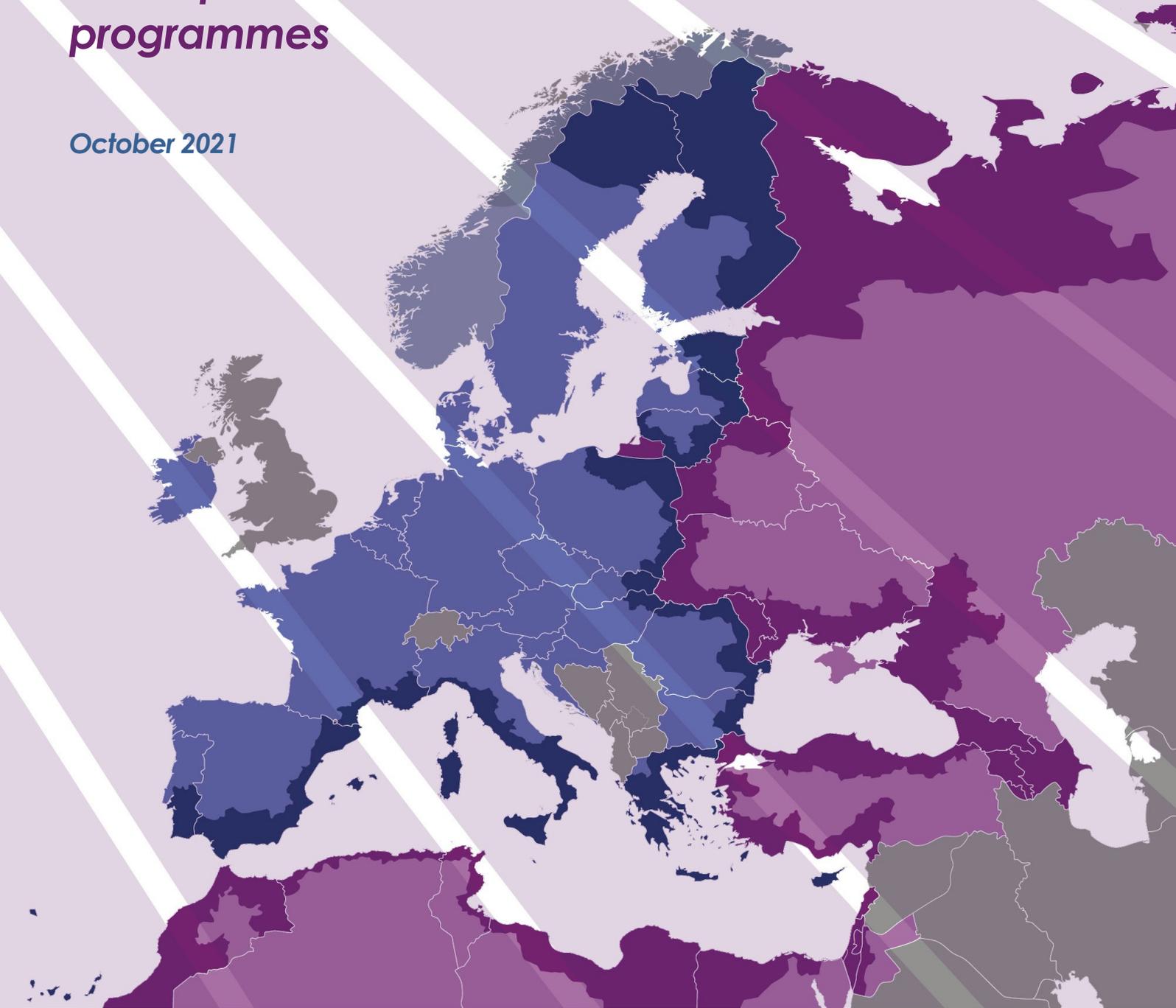


Taking coordination and cooperation to the NEXT level

*“Joint work to achieve more together” -
The experience of ENI CBC
programmes*

October 2021



Funded by the
European Union



Technical Support to the Implementation and Management of ENI CBC programmes, implemented by a consortium led by Particip

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Introduction

This paper is addressed to the Managing Authorities and the Joint Technical Secretariats of the ENI CBC and Interreg NEXT programmes, as well as the National Authorities of the participating countries.

It provides an **overview of the cooperation and coordination activities among the ENI CBC programmes and – where existing – between these and Interreg programmes**¹. The overview covers the coordination and cooperation activities:

- 1) planned at the programme development stage;
- 2) implemented so far;
- 3) foreseen for the NEXT generation of programmes.

The sources of information include:

- a desk review of the programme documents;
- the interviews with the programmes held as a preparation for the cluster events with Interreg NEXT programmes in November 2020;
- the knowledge gathered by the TESIM experts in their daily communication with the programmes;
- the presentations of the European Commission;
- the extensive work done by Interact on cooperation among Interreg programmes.

For the purpose of this document, the term “**coordination**” refers to activities happening rather (but not only) ex ante, by identifying and defining complementarities between different funding programmes or among which synergies can be created, whereas “**cooperation**” is more related to the process of using these complementarities and synergies.

¹ The document does not go in depth on the cooperation and coordination activities with other funding sources, plans and programmes.



1. What was planned during the programming phase?

In their Joint Operational Programmes, the ENI CBC programmes had to describe their planned “*coherence with other Union-financed programmes in the countries and regions concerned together with an analysis of coherence with national and regional strategies and policies*”, as requested by the ENI CBC Implementing Rules².

On top of the legal requirements, the ex-post evaluation of ENPI CBC programmes emphasized “*the need for synergies between different programmes, the avoidance of overlapping and the prevention of the risk of double financing*”.

While **the first challenge is to avoid overlapping in various dimensions**, it is not always easy to separate negative overlaps or duplications from potential complementarities. Hence, at programming stage, avoiding duplication between projects was the primary aim. However, as revealed by the programmes in the interviews, during the implementation phase not only the duplications were avoided but many synergies were achieved.

The chapters related to the coherence in the Joint Operational Programmes usually list:

- the regional and national plans and instruments and macro-regional strategies to which the programmes will contribute to;
- the relevant EU and national programmes with which overlaps and duplications need to be avoided.

The extent and the information included differs a lot from one programme document to the other: from listing the territories and priorities of other programmes to a very thorough analysis of the overlapping thematic areas with other policies and instruments.

In most programmes the main focus of the provided information is to assure that the programmes will use the available tools to minimise the risk of overlaps and avoid double-financing of the projects and their planned activities.

Key message No1: Strong focus on prevention of overlaps and double financing in the Joint operational programme documents!

² Commission Implementing Regulation No 897 / 2014 of 18 August 2014.



As to the **tools for prevention of overlaps and double-financing**, programmes mainly planned to rely on the following ones:



There are also programmes which already at their planning stage envisaged **additional cooperation and coordination activities**, stating that they can help increase the effectiveness of the programme implementation, support in dissemination of the best practices, and help to increase the effects delivered to the programme areas. Both bilateral cooperation with the neighbouring programmes, as well as with the entire ENI CBC community in the form of networking activities, is seen as useful in this respect.

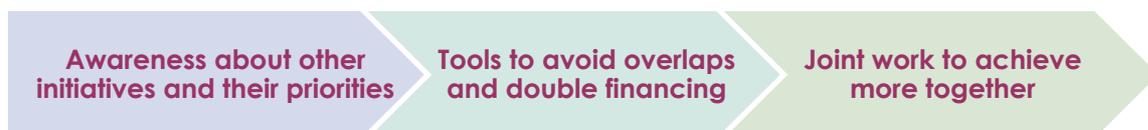
Cooperation and exchange of experiences with the other CBC programmes are also vital in order to disseminate best practices. This cooperation can be bilateral between different programmes but events for all CBC programmes are also seen as valuable.

Karelia CBC Joint Operational Programme

Initiatives to support synergies and complementarities will be promoted by means of workshops, meetings, joint cooperation events, capitalisation and dissemination activities, and other information/awareness-raising actions concerning territorial development. The adoption of a thematic approach and the establishment of thematic working groups with a consultative and monitoring role are foreseen.

Mediterranean Sea Basin ENI CBC Joint Operational Programme

To sum it all up, there are **three main domains** that the programmes addressed in relation to the cooperation and coordination, namely:



Further in this paper we will focus on the practices already put in place by the programmes in order to foster this “**joint work to achieve more together**” and we will identify potential areas to expand them in the future.

2. What happened during the implementation?

Looking at the cooperation activities in the ENI CBC programmes during the years of programme implementation so far, one can see that **the joint work and cooperation among the programmes has been much more extensive than initially planned**. To our knowledge, among the various measures foreseen in the programmes, the prevention of overlaps and double financing was ensured in the end via two core means. First of all, programmes relied on the National Authorities from countries which participate in more than one programme committee and are thus in the best position to ensure the transfer of information and knowledge among programmes. On top of this, also specific working groups or sub-committees were created, and prevention of overlaps was also incorporated into the work of the MA/JTS during project assessment and implementation.

Key message No 2: So far, the ENI CBC programmes have delivered in establishing tools for prevention of overlaps and double financing.

Sharing a common participating country has been a very strong driver of the cooperation need between the programmes (for example, cooperation among the programmes involving the Russian Federation or those involving Ukraine), but not the only one. On top of this, the existence already of a tradition of cooperation has proven almost equally a strong factor for further intensifying the exchanges. Therefore, the cooperation is present in multiple ways: from the programme-driven initiative of the Northern cluster network to the joint development of the expenditure verification package in the Romania-Ukraine, Romania-Republic of Moldova and Black Sea Basin Programmes, to mention a few.

Key message No 3: In addition to the commitments in the programme documents, cooperation took many different shapes and forms.



In the chapters below you will find the outcome of the TESIM mapping of the cooperation activities in the ENI CBC activities. We have distinguished **four broad categories of cooperation**, but please note that the aim of this typology is only to group measures similar by their nature, regardless of the intensity or content. The list is not 100% exhaustive, meaning that the cooperation in the programmes is not limited only to the examples mentioned below.

2.1. Regular cooperation and coordination measures

One of the examples of intensive, regular and formalised cooperation measures are two **cooperation clusters**: one involving the seven programmes with Russia and the other involving the four programmes with Ukraine. These clusters meet twice per year, as well as exchange on a regular basis in-between meetings. When it comes to the topics tackled during these exchanges, they have addressed both **implementation arrangements and challenges** (e.g., practices of developing application packs, expenditure verification documents, communication measures, definition of calendars), as well as **strategic cooperation aspects** (e.g., managing Branch Offices, co-delivering strategic events). Clusters offer a good possibility to take exchanges to the next level, especially for the programmes with a common participating country.

Table “Examples No.1”:

| Cluster cooperation | Regular, formal coordination meetings | Exchanges via the 'same' Branch Office |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Cluster, with the seven programmes involving Russia (Kolarctic, Karelia, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Latvia-Russia, Lithuania-Russia and Poland-Russia) Eastern Cluster, with the four programmes involving Ukraine (Poland-Belarus-Ukraine, Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine, Romania-Ukraine and Black Sea Basin) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kolarctic, Karelia and South-East Finland-Russia meet on a regular basis to exchange on the implementing modalities Strategic cooperation of Arctic programmes (involving Kolarctic, Karelia and Interreg programmes) On the overlapping territories in Poland, exchanges between Poland-Belarus-Ukraine, Poland-Slovakia and Poland-Czechia take place. Similar approach in Hungary for Interreg, IPA CBC and ENI CBC programmes in which Hungary participates, including Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine, as well as in Italy between the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme, which cooperates with Italy-Malta, Italy-Tunisia and Italy-France Interreg | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about activities in the overlapping territories exchanged via the shared Branch Offices: Poland-Russia and Lithuania-Russia (same hosting organisation for the Branch Office in Kaliningrad), as well as Karelia and South-East Finland-Russia (same hosting organisation for the programme Branch Offices in Russia) At national level, informal annual meetings of the Russian Branch Offices |

In the addition to the table above, we would also like to highlight **virtual, informal meetings** taking place, for example, the 'coffee meetings' between the South-East Finland-Russia and Estonia-Russia Programmes to discuss implementation modalities, exchange practices and share the news between the programmes.

2.2. Events and communication activities

This type of cooperation is related to the **organisation and delivery** both of programme events and external ones. It is important to highlight that the degree of cooperation differs from case to case: it can be limited to the simple participation and delivery of a presentation in the event organised by another programme or involve the co-planning and co-delivery of a joint external event.

Table “Examples No.2”:

| Co-delivered events | Participation in the events of other programmes | Joint promotion activities |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side event at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe (seven programmes cooperating with Russia) • Joint event on EU-Russia cooperation at the Committee of Regions (seven programmes cooperating with Russia) • Arctic Cooperation Conference and Arctic Award 2019 in Copenhagen (Kolarctic, Karelia, Interreg Nord, Interreg Botnia-Atlantica, Interreg NPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poland-Russia participated in the auditor training in Kaliningrad, organised by Lithuania-Russia • Poland - Belarus - Ukraine, Romania - Ukraine and Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine participated in the training of Ukrainian controllers organised by Black Sea Basin • South-East Finland - Russia participated in the Arctic Cooperation Conference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint presentation of Kolarctic, Karelia and South-East Finland-Russia at the Federation Council in Russia and during the Strategic Forum in Saint-Petersburg • Co-organised EC Day event in Saint-Petersburg by Kolarctic, Karelia, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Latvia-Russia and Baltic Sea Region • Co-organised EC Day event in Tunisia by Mediterranean Sea Basin and Italy-Tunisia |

2.3. Implementation tools and arrangements

One of the cooperation actions that has a direct impact on the programmes is the **development of implementation tools**. This type of cooperation can be described as an *economy of scale*: several programmes working together on a concrete outcome instead of each programme doing things separately. A good example of this is the joint development of the monitoring systems both in the North and the East presented in the graphic below. Examples of other implementation tools that have benefitted from the cooperation are the application packs, the expenditure verification documents and the communication plans.

Table “Examples No.3”:

| Practical joint tools in ENI CBC | Exchanges before and during the project assessment | Joint development of templates |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROMAS system for the management of Kolarctic, Karelia and South-East Finland-Russia • Joint development of MIS system for Romania-Republic of Moldova and Romania-Ukraine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poland-Russia contacting the Lithuania-Russia Programme during the assessment of projects due to possible overlap of the activities for the same beneficiary • Cooperation in the development of project assessment documents in the programmes managed by Romania (Black Sea Basin, Romania - Republic of Moldova, Romania - Ukraine) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared development of application pack and template for expenditure verification by auditors for Romania-Republic of Moldova, Romania-Ukraine and Black Sea Basin • Exchanges on the development of the application pack and the expenditure verification package in the Northern Cluster events |

3. What does the future hold?

The European Commission has repeatedly highlighted the need for cooperation and coordination in NEXT programmes, specifically in the form of **building on complementarities and addressing overlaps**. Inter-programme cooperation has been addressed also in the Joint Programming paper, as well as in the letters on the “Geography of the Interreg NEXT programmes” sent in June 2020.

Programming

*Section 1.2 template:
joint investment needs and complementarities and synergies with other forms of support,....macro-regional strategies, sea-basin strategies, where the programme is covered by strategies*

Provide information on coordination:

- ✓ Substance: overview of objectives of common interest with neighbouring programmes (option in table format annexed to the programme)
- ✓ Governance: short description of structures for coordination in place/planned
- ✓ Option: programmes work together on a common text on coordination, which can be inserted in all cooperating programmes



Implementation

Can be done in many ways, for ex:

- ✓ Cooperation between programme authorities
- ✓ Common events across programmes
- ✓ Project level cooperation
- ✓ Using existing cooperation structures

ENI CBC examples are showcased at the Interreg Annual Event's final session (video available)



The interviews with the programmes in autumn 2020 and the knowledge that TESIM experts have gathered through daily communication reveal that, in most cases, the programmes have a clear vision on taking the cooperation and coordination to the NEXT level.

Here are some of the **concrete actions** considered, in addition to the continuation of already existing measures:

Table “Examples No.4”:

| Intensified exchange of information | Risk management | Increasing the impact of the programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger coordination when planning calls in the regions that participate in several programmes • Use of JEMS - coordination of adaptations (e.g. specific solutions or plug-ins for external programmes), exchange on best practices • Use of KEEP - information not only about the projects, but also for the use of the national authorities and other actors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dimension - to the risk management - to ensure that there are no capacity risks of managing several large infrastructure projects by the same beneficiary in different programmes • Revisiting the approach to the exchange of information for the assessment of double financing activities in case of same beneficiaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint communication and promotional activities specifically aimed to increase the impact and attract bigger audiences • New approach to the coordination in the launch of calls for proposals, especially for overlapping territories, to gain synergies |

3.1. Joint actions related to the preparation of post-2020 programmes

On a general note, the programmes intensively exchange about the programming exercise, via **direct contacts** among them or through the participation at TESIM, Interact and Commission **events**. In fact, notwithstanding the importance of bilateral and multilateral programme coordination /cooperation measures, there is a strong dimension of triangulation with TESIM, as well as Interact, addressing the dimension of the “community of practice”.

One of the recent examples of activities specifically dedicated to the post-2020 programmes are the seminars on the improvement of **synergies across the Mediterranean**. These were organised as a series of events co-organised by Interact and TESIM on updates for programming 2021-2027 and involving 17 Interreg programmes operating in the region, including the Mediterranean Sea Basin and Italy-Tunisia Programmes.

When it comes to **specific activities**, where cooperation is at the backbone of the process, we would also like to specifically mention the following ones:

- joint **call for SEA experts** for Member States and Norway (Kolarctic, South-East Finland-Russia) and Central Baltic;
- joint **procurement for maintenance and services** related to **JEMS** (launched by Central Baltic, including services to Kolarctic, Karelia and South-East Finland-Russia);

Many of the activities described in chapters 2.1 to 2.3 also include a dimension related to the post-2020 programming, for example, discussing practices in preparing the territorial analysis and other documents, and discussing key challenges.

Key message No 4: The preparation of Interreg NEXT programmes gives ample evidence that, where previous cooperation exists, facing a new challenging task tends to amplify it, driven by the mutual need for added value.

3.2. Potential for cooperation at project level

A final aspect to emphasize is the project dimension of cooperation and coordination. Despite the fact that **the majority of programmes report a lack of coordination among projects within the programme, let alone among the programmes**, this topic has been boiling under the surface for a while now, as many times the programmes have noted that **cross-project coordination represents a great potential for added value**.

The potential is two-fold: from prevention – to avoid duplication between projects - to a proactive coordination –to nurture positive overlaps, discover synergies and promote cross-programme capitalisation.

When taken to a cross-programme dimension, these synergies take on a wider value and contribute to a collective reflection beyond the boundaries of individual programmes, paving the way for the recognition of common goals and the identification of new challenges. Beyond **bilateral synergies between projects**, there is room for clustering and for a **more systemic collaboration**, both thematic and geographic.

