



# Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Cooperation Policy

*Young Europeans' involvement in the future of European Territorial Cooperation*

Regional and  
Urban Policy



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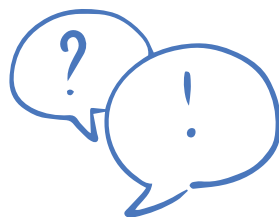
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**Interreg**   
**30 years together**







## Why this Manifesto, now?

2020 marks 30 years of the EU's flagship cooperation scheme called "Interreg". The three main topics linked to the celebration of **30 years of achievements** in making European borders an opportunity thanks to a cooperative spirit are: **neighbours, green and youth.**

**A**s one of the three main topics of the Interreg 30-year campaign, "youth" aims to show that even if young people are already part of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), much more can and should still be done. How? By collecting young people's ideas and wishes on how to improve territorial cooperation in the future in order to make young generations feel heard by EU top decision makers.

This youth-oriented and democratic exercise in 2020 is not only topical because of the Interreg 30-year celebrative campaign but also because it's a year of political changes between two EU budget periods, namely 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. Hence, 2020 is the best moment to express views in order to influence Interreg policy making and its project-based implementation.

**This Manifesto presents young people's ideas on Interreg and especially on how to make it more in line with their expectations.** It is mainly addressed to policy makers at EU, national, regional and local

level as well as to Interreg Managing Authorities and project beneficiaries, organisations interested in EU cohesion – and especially Interreg – policy making, youth, citizens' engagement and democratic participation.

The ideas presented here have been collected by European Commission staff via targeted surveys, polls and online group discussions with young people from all over Europe (i.e. EU, outermost regions and its neighboring countries).

EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira and the German Presidency of the EU Council will receive the Manifesto on 15 October 2020 at the Interreg Annual Event during the dedicated youth dialogue, in the presence of some of the young people who have contributed. The aim is to debate and listen to EU top decision makers' reactions to the Manifesto.

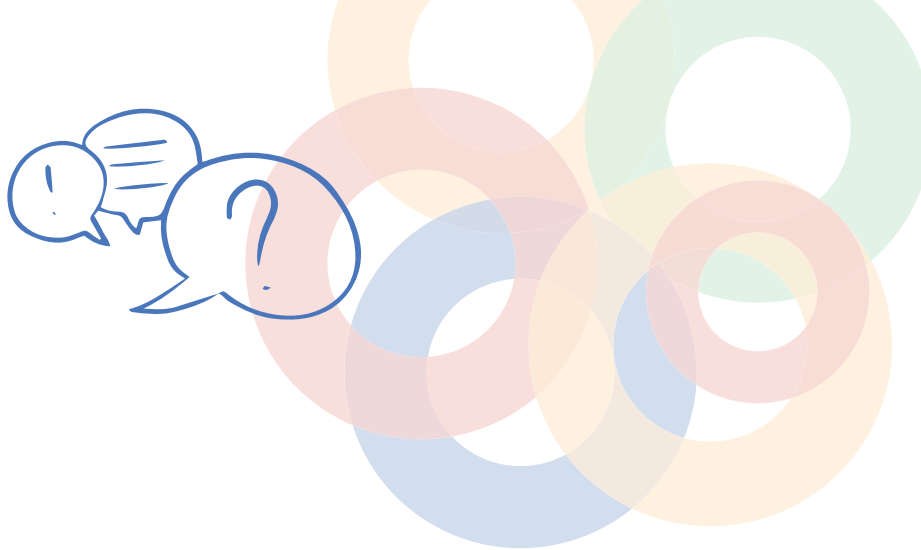
<sup>1</sup> European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), better known as Interreg, is part of cohesion policy and it supports the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The overarching objective is to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> As part of Interreg youth-related activities, cohesion policy already supports the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) project and other youth-related projects displayed on [keep.eu](https://keep.eu)

<sup>3</sup> Online Youth Dialogue (23/06/2020), follow up calls with ca. 20 young people on 17/07/2020 and on 25/09/2020, EU survey targeted to IVY participants.



## What do young people think about European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg?



When addressing the question, *“How do you experience European cooperation? And what is the added value of European cooperation for you?”* most young people, coming from different backgrounds (students, young professionals, volunteers), replied that

**European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg is the key to breaking down barriers between borders and to increasing trust and common understanding for joint actions,**

by *‘solving problems together. Being together to plan solutions’*. It appears that most of the impact lays on values, representing the essence of the European project, to make the EU sustainable and *‘in harmony’*. Young generations consider the importance of Interreg as contributing to building a feeling of European community thanks to “multiculturalism linked with solidarity”. In addition,

**Interreg is seen as the relevant established framework at regional level that allows ‘to change people’s mindset, helping them to develop their personal and professional skills, through inter-culturalism and cooperation’.**

Finally, Interreg is meaningful for the younger generation, as it covers the whole European Union (including the outermost

regions) and beyond, with several levels of cooperation, through Interreg programmes and Macro Regional Strategies.

Young people who have participated – or are still participating – in the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) initiative replied to an anonymous ad hoc survey. They are particularly familiar with how Interreg works in practice having volunteered for a period of 2 to 6 months in a specific Interreg project (as Interreg Project Partner, i.e. contributing to the project implementation) or at a programme level (as Interreg Reporter, i.e. contributing to the communication actions of a certain cross-border, Interregional or transnational area).

When asked about the main strengths of European cooperation, IVY volunteers believe that **Interreg is:**

**-a tool to build mutual trust and unite people from different cultural and expertise backgrounds** but with the same objectives and interests. **Without it, public administrators may feel disconnected;**

**-about a comprehensive approach: Interreg is not just an administrative or economic scheme but also one that promotes socio-cultural cooperation;**

**-about a variety of projects** from small people-to-people to emergency response (e.g. hospitals and fires);

**-essential to change the border from an obstacle to an opportunity** (e.g. additional or other work opportunities, services, etc...);

**- about supporting remote, peripheral, less developed areas** by pooling resources to find solutions to common challenges, including in non-EU countries.



When asked about the main challenges of European cooperation, IVY participants believe that:

-Interreg is too technical and bureaucratic, with **too little importance given to communication matters** which are usually underestimated as Interreg is not an easy subject to explain to the general public, not easily accessible to external people, with language and cultural barriers. This leads to a general lack of awareness about this topic;

-**digital, modern and agile external and internal communication should be boosted;**

-physical meetings which require moving by plane with high CO2 impact should be avoided, especially as it is against the very Interreg principle of protecting the environment;

-there is a **lack of interaction and connection among similar projects** with the risk of repeating similar projects in the same geographical area;

-there is a **lack of long-term impact and political support.**

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<sup>4</sup> "Good, many digital events now. **Breaking down barriers between borders to improve trust and common understanding for common action.**"

Participant of the Online Youth Dialogue via Sli.do (23/06/2020)

<sup>5</sup> Participant of the Online Youth Dialogue via Sli.do (23/06/2020)

<sup>6</sup> Idem

<sup>7</sup> Idem

<sup>8</sup> The anonymous survey only addressed to IVY participants run from February to June 2020 with a total of 115 contributions collected.

<sup>9</sup> "Ability to raise money and network to fund research projects and territorial experiences, which would have been impossible without subsidies and diversified professional network from different countries." "Interreg brings together the best partners at a transnational level to address shared challenges in innovative ways. **The role of Interreg programs to take up a share of the high financial risk linked with really innovative projects appears to me fundamental to steer progress** [towards the achievement of core goals such as strengthening research and innovation to] & promote the shift to a low-carbon economy, resource efficiency and adaptation to climate change, or preserve biodiversity." (IVY volunteers via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>10</sup> "While there was generous budget allocated for it, the desired solutions were «theoretical»-publications, roadmaps, booklets but no funds given to youth organisations or municipalities that could implement the designed youth policies." (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>11</sup> "Interreg brings together partners of excellence from different countries to tackle shared challenges in innovative and potentially game-changing ways. However, most of these successful projects lack long-term political support from member states and regional authorities. Only such political support would keep projects and their concepts alive after the flow of money from the program stops. If public authorities do not capitalize on successful pilot projects and do not scale them up, the most revolutionary projects will remain a one-time experience." (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)



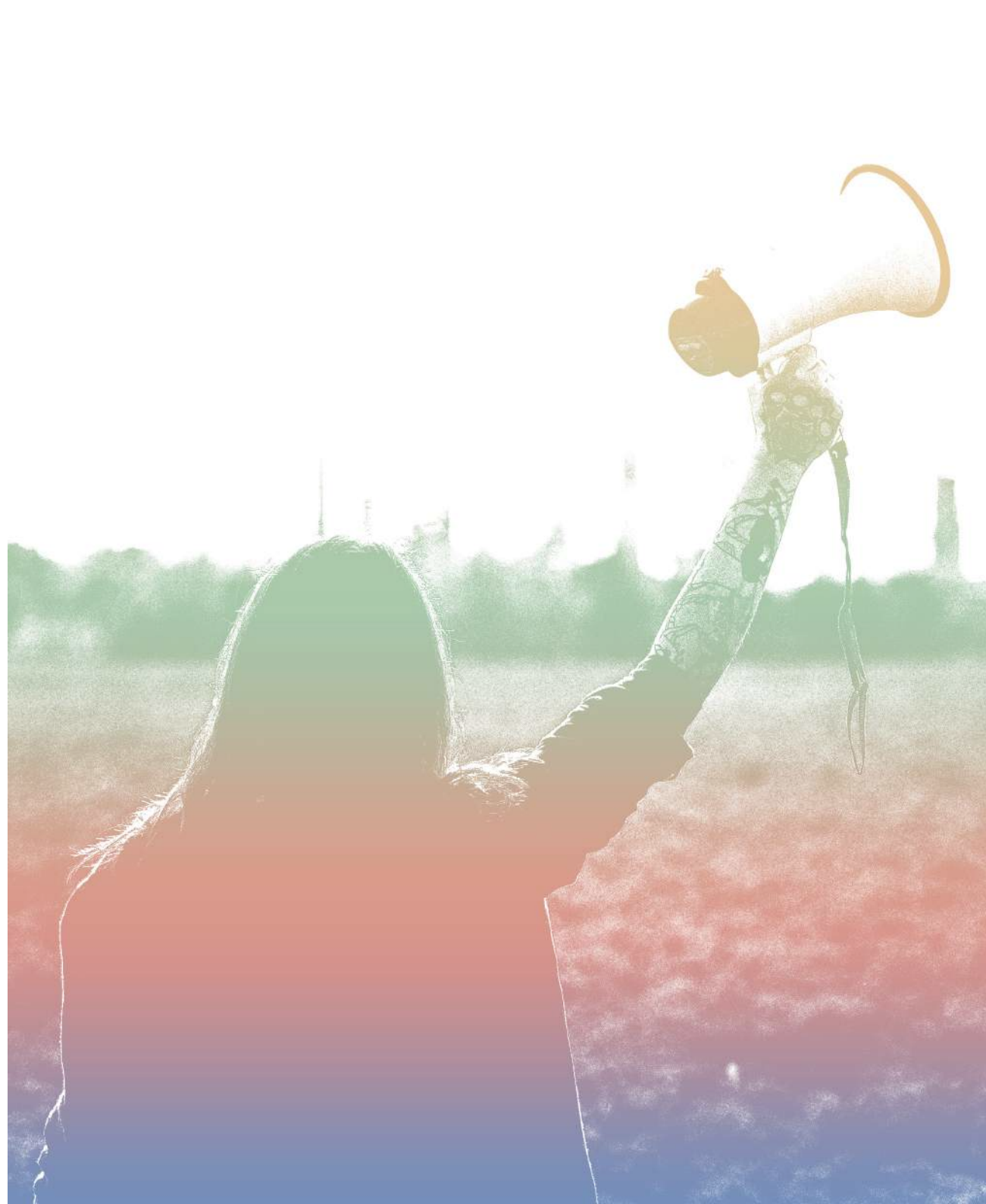
## What should European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg priorities be in the future according to young people?



If Interreg addresses today a large number of crosscutting issues, it is clear that young people want it to be more targeted to their long-term needs.

When asked about “*What is the most important topic/challenge EU cooperation should address?*” young people who joined the online debate on 23 June 2020 identified five fields of action where Interreg could act to better support them:

- 1. Improving young people’s skills & increase access to training opportunities**
- 2. Boosting employment for young people in Europe**
- 3. Simplification of rules and a better communication via digital tools**
- 4. Addressing Climate Change issues for a better future**
- 5. Boosting citizens’ engagement in policy making & implementation**





1.

## Improving young people's skills & increase access to training opportunities

Young people want to have equal opportunities, especially when it comes to learning new skills and access to vocational training. Therefore, **Interreg should offer intercultural learning opportunities and help to overcome language barriers to ease youth's social inclusion.** For most of them, **education** is the key to make sure that young people in Europe better know what the EU and Interreg are about and to influence their shaping. On the one hand, Interreg could finance language classes, and not only in English. This should also take place at schools, in order to make kids aware of EU's impact in their regions, especially in border regions. To do so, **Interreg projects should be reachable through digital platform and digital courses.** If some Interreg projects are implementing this type of actions across borders, it seems that it is not enough, and that young people are not aware of the link with Interreg, i.e. the EU's dimension. One of the suggestions could be *"Being complementary to ERASMUS+ by promoting exchanges at the local cross-border level and among students"*. If Interreg projects are ready to fund this type of training with a link with Interreg, **project managers should ensure a proper recognition of skills by aligning them with already existing certifications like APM, PRINCE.** This would boost the value of the Interreg projects and ensure the quality of the training in a broader context.

IVY volunteers also covered this point in their replies to the survey, especially arguing for the **need for more expert support to local actors and to promote easy or free access to language learning services.**



## 2.

# Boosting employment for young people in Europe



The financial crisis in 2008 and the current coronavirus pandemic strongly affect the labour market with youth employment particularly suffering from it. Young generations feel lower-qualified and unable to find a job in their region, or even in Europe. **Interreg should play a more crucial role in coordinating job opportunities and better communicating on projects supporting youth employment.** To do so, using digital tools can help with job matching across regions. In addition, Interreg programmes and Macro Regional Strategies have the capacity and the network of companies and SMEs, where some job opportunities for young people could be found. A possible solution could be to **increase “the involvement of companies and make sure there is a conversation between companies and local partners”**. This way, Interreg would become a real boost for youth employment.

In addition, IVY volunteers argue that in order to ensure a good inter-generational approach in project implementation, youth must be involved, which is indeed in line with the IVY project. This is why **the IVY initiative should become an integral, permanent part of Interreg and be more valued as a boost for young people’s employment.**





### 3.

## Simplification of rules and a better communication via digital tools



If young people do not feel interested and involved enough in Interreg, it is mostly because they do not know about it. Therefore, the European Commission and Interreg programmes together with Macro Regional Strategies' key actors should use a simple and catchy language. The rules to be part of Interreg programmes are perceived as too complicated and therefore most young people interested in or knowledgeable about Interreg are not representative of the broader young European population. To make young people active one should use digital tools, **appropriate social media** (like Instagram, TikTok, and more), and should **stop using dry institutional communication** with endless political speeches. One of the solutions would be to create partnerships with schools and universities and to allow young people to draft articles in their blogs or university newspapers about Interreg matters. In addition, **Interreg project calls should be accessible to the young generation with simple rules**. For example, if young people want to lead a project, they should benefit from simplified rules (e.g., less administrative burden from the application to the auditing phase). Furthermore, Interreg should be communicated at regional and local scale in national/regional languages. As an example, the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) network is involving young people to encourage them to be active and engaged especially for climate matters where inter-generational solidarity is even more evident; some articles and social media posts on youth involvement in the Baltic area are disseminated in the various Baltic languages to make sure they can be understood by as many readers as possible. Moreover, young people believe

that an independent institutional body could be set up to monitor and even motivate their regular participation.

IVY volunteers believe that it is necessary to increase Interreg visibility among media; to have fewer but longer and more impactful projects rather than many but short ones. Moreover, they argue that more attention should be paid in the project selection of Interreg calls. More direct funding should be made available and social inclusion boosted by, for example, involving people with disabilities. Also, **successful project results should be capitalised going beyond the specific Interreg area concerned to put the achievements at the benefit of the rest of the continent**.

<sup>12</sup> "I would create one or more European team(s) that could investigate possible needs for Interreg projects: this team(s) might propose to possible partners to start an Interreg project in areas where there are not enough initiatives, giving guidance. Interreg is, in fact, still not very well known by the majority of people, and it might simply be that many private associations/public institutions do not start a project just because they don't know about this initiative" (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>13</sup> "I would suggest to improve the communication around projects at the grassroots and small community levels in border regions so that people can appreciate and know about the Interreg projects surrounding them and how they benefit from them. I would also suggest to improve the learning of languages in cross-border regions so as to facilitate communication and work between communities on both sides of the border. This could maybe be implemented through the sharing of time in children's classes between schools on both sides of the border and promoting student exchanges." (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>14</sup> Participants from the Assembly of European Regions (AER) have proposed to use their region-focused job-matching platform for young people (Eurodissey). It could be an option for Interreg programmes or projects to use this network to promote youth employment opportunities

<sup>15</sup> Like the "At school of OpenCohesion" (ASOC) project

<sup>16</sup> The Youth4Regions programme for aspiring journalists could be a good starting point for this

<sup>17</sup> "Don't be naive. Many people write projects useless but fitting very well calls for projects because they are written to fit calls and get funds, not to bring something new. However, many knowledgeable people coming from the field have excellent, innovative and creative ideas! But not fitting any call for project... Or they may fit it but because project leaders are not integrated into EU networks, they do not know the EU-fashioned terms and informal rules, and they lose EU opportunities for funding... So why do not create open calls? Calls for ideas? Something with fewer guidelines and requisites to enable the funding of out-of-the-box but useful ideas, worth becoming EU projects" (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>18</sup> "To empower regional and local authorities for simplified programming procedures for smaller organisations" (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

<sup>19</sup> It would be interesting to cooperate at EU level on Interreg matters, not leaving projects with innovative and useful ideas only in a specific region. In order to do that, I think DG REGIO [European Commission's Directorate General for Regional & Urban Policy] should be focused on capitalizing in this sense, helping with specific ideas and guidelines the programmes." (IVY volunteer via EU survey, 2020)

4.

## Addressing Climate Change issues for a better future

According to young people, **Interreg should address climate change issues as a priority**. The current environmental crisis should be tackled at the EU scale, by capitalising and harmonising actions in the regions.

IVY participants also stressed this point, and argued that the use of polluting transport for project meetings should decrease by organising less frequent but longer physical gatherings. Moreover, **each Interreg project should be invited to track its carbon footprint** and if possible, find ways to compensate, for example by donating to pertinent associations or encouraging environment-friendly behaviours in the workplace.

5.

## Boosting citizens' engagement in policy making & implementation

IVY participants believe that **people-to-people (smaller) projects are a major solution to involve smaller associations and citizens**. All Interreg projects should integrate this type of funds in their general budget to give a wider visibility to Interreg actions. In addition, **a more regular dialogue between young people and EU staff should be ensured**. What young people want to see are faces, human beings behind the documents and rules. Hence, transparent exchanges between youth and EU staff should be more regularly organised, either through bilateral talks at the regular meetings (like the Interreg Annual Event, the Annual Fora of the Macro Regional Strategies), for example, where young people could be invited.





## 12 recommendations from young people to boost their involvement in European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg and make it more in line with their needs

Based on the discussions and the analysis of the results presented in this Manifesto, some recommendations can be made to align Interreg to the next generation's expectations.

### {BOOSTING EXCHANGES AMONGST EU OFFICIALS AND YOUNG PEOPLE}

A more regular cycle of consultation and dialogues among EU staff and young people should be created, by:

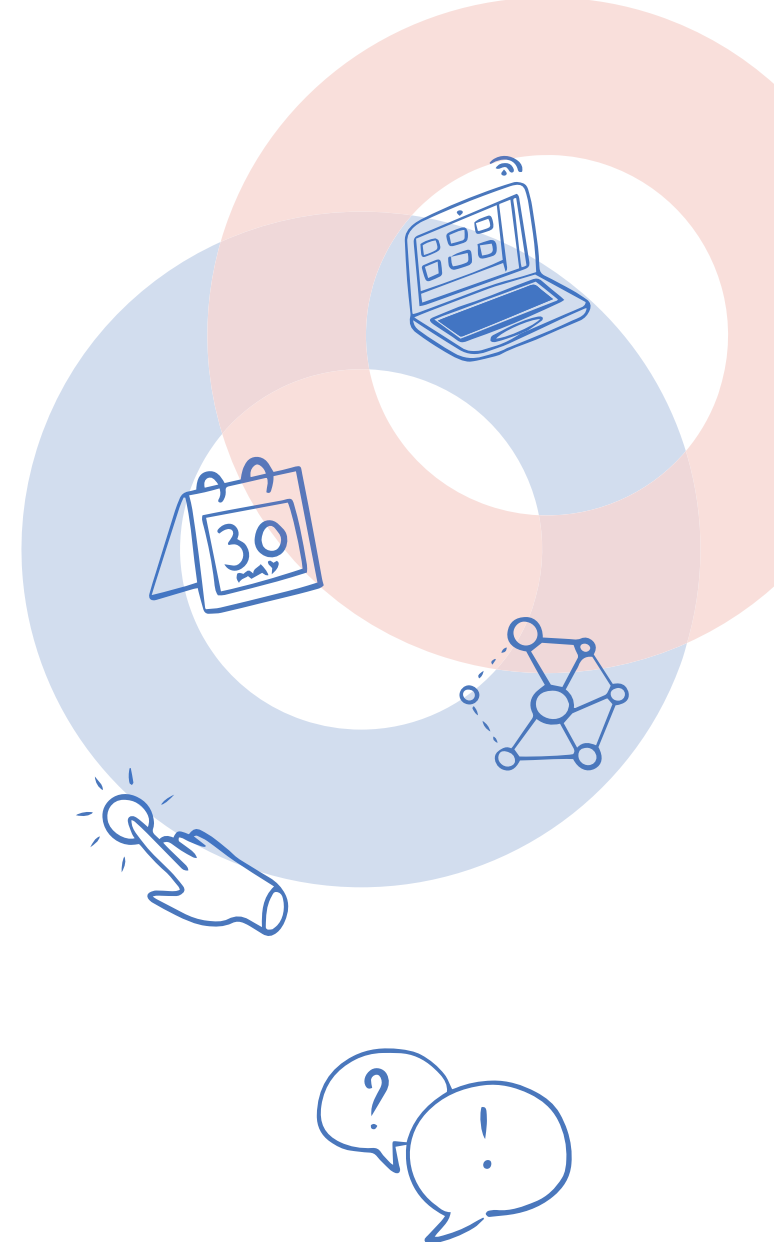
**1.** Increasing the number of online events and meetings via digital platforms, with a clear timeline and pre-established agenda to facilitate civil society organisations' and young people's involvement.

**2.** Planning regular thematic meetings (for example two per year) on Interreg matters with young people and European Commission's staff specialised in territorial cooperation.

**3.** Involving young people in meetings of relevant EU-wide groups and networks, such as the Interreg Annual Meetings, the Interreg Communication Officers Network, and INFORM.

**4.** Enabling young people to encourage their region to apply for the REGIOSTARS Award competition and consider keeping a category dedicated to youth every year.

**5.** Further promoting the regular exchanges within existing governance structures like the Macro Regional Strategies, at regional level (e.g. boosting more regular dialogue with young people during the Annual Fora allowing them to participate in the B2B meetings...) and make sure that NGOs are also part of those exchanges.







## {BOOSTING COMMUNICATION TOWARDS YOUNG PEOPLE VIA EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES}

The way Interreg works and the opportunities linked to it should be better clarified and made visible among young people by:

**6.** Increasing the knowledge of Interreg in schools and universities: Interreg programmes (Managing Authorities) should create partnerships with local schools and universities to talk about Interreg and to make young people more aware.

**7.** Encouraging European Commission's staff to boost their participation to the **"Back to School/University"** initiative and students to pro-actively contact and invite EU staff to go visit their school and university.

**8.** Creating and disseminating dedicated **"edutainment"** programme on territorial cooperation via Interreg projects or with massive open online courses (MOOC) that may interest students and teachers.





## {ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION WITHIN INTERREG PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS}

Interreg should offer ways to better involve young people by:

**9.** Encouraging each Interreg programme to plan more calls **more easily accessible by young people with simpler rules and a dedicated budget.**

**10.** Inviting young people in meetings and enable them to **actively participate to the monitoring committees.**

**11.** Mobilising resources for the Interreg priority objective related to **boosting skills and tackling youth unemployment.**

**12.** **Boosting more EU inter-institutional and multi-governance relations, dialogues and actions on young people's role and needs linked to Interreg.**

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PDF

ISBN 978-92-76-22545-4

doi:10.2776/018697

KN-02-20-795-EN-N