

ArtCo 2025 – The Art of Cooperation
Budapest, 2–3 December 2025

Workshop #2: The role of Interreg in eliminating cross-border obstacles

The workshop explored the persistent legal and administrative barriers that hinder cross-border cooperation and the role of Interreg in addressing them. Following an introductory video illustrating practical challenges at borders, the discussion highlighted that such obstacles are not only economically costly but also affect social cohesion, trust, and perceptions between neighbouring regions.

Participants underlined that cross-border obstacles are particularly frequent in areas of national competence, such as healthcare, transport, and emergency services. Numerous examples demonstrated how incompatible legal frameworks, administrative procedures, and technical systems continue to prevent efficient cooperation. These include higher costs for cross-border services, differences in labour and wage regulations, legal risks for emergency responders crossing borders, and non-interoperable systems such as dispatch centres or radio communications. While some technical solutions can be achieved through sustained coordination, others remain blocked by missing legal frameworks or slow institutional processes.

A recurring message was that addressing cross-border obstacles requires moving beyond isolated, project-based solutions towards more strategic and systemic approaches. While Interreg's bottom-up structure enables the identification of real-life problems, funding constraints and programme timelines limit the ability to resolve obstacles on a case-by-case basis. Strategic operations, supported by structured analysis and engagement with national authorities, were presented as an effective way to scale up impact. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for “software integration,” meaning the alignment of regulations, administrative practices, and data systems, alongside investments in physical infrastructure.

The discussion also focused on the proposed *Bridge for EU* regulation and the related cross-border coordination mechanism. The Commission representative highlighted that many technical obstacles ultimately stem from national legal frameworks, and that voluntary cooperation alone is often insufficient. The proposed regulation would introduce a formal obligation for authorities to assess and respond to identified cross-border obstacles, strengthening accountability and moving from informal coordination to legally anchored solutions.

From a national and regional perspective, the cross-border coordination mechanism was welcomed as a flexible and proactive tool. Establishing dedicated coordination points and clear contact structures within administrations was seen as a way to move from reactive handling of individual cases to systematic problem-solving, including in cooperation with non-EU neighbouring countries. Participants stressed that reserving dedicated Interreg resources to address legal and administrative barriers—before launching technical pilot projects—can significantly accelerate solutions. Combining Interreg funding with expert support tools was highlighted as a particularly effective approach, provided there is sufficient political commitment from all parties involved.

Practical examples demonstrated that many obstacles are administrative rather than strictly legal and can be resolved through targeted engagement with competent authorities. More complex legal barriers, such as those affecting cross-border emergency

services, may take years to resolve but can lead to transformative outcomes, including bilateral agreements and integrated cross-border service networks that directly save lives.

The workshop concluded that successful cross-border coordination does not depend on the number of formal structures but on effective interfaces, proactive communication, and institutional commitment. Key success factors identified include embedding coordination mechanisms within existing frameworks such as Interreg, ensuring visible added value without creating additional bureaucracy, and maintaining a proactive, citizen-focused approach. Overall, participants agreed that Interreg, supported by the new regulatory tools, has a crucial role to play in systematically eliminating cross-border obstacles and strengthening territorial cohesion across Europe.

