



ETC/Interreg Regulation – Model for Interreg programmes

Annex to Regulation (EU) Nr. 2021/1059 (ETC Regulation)

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	TOTAAL EMR	INTERREG TOTAL	MEMBER STATES	NUTS 2		NUTS 3		
				NUTS-CODE	NAME	NUTS-CODE	NAME	
		BELGIUM	BE22	PROVINCIE LIMBURG	BE224	ARR. HASSELT		
					BE225	ARR. MAASEIK		
			BE223	ARR. TONGEREN				
					BE332	ARR. LUIK		
					BE335	ARR. VERVIERS – COMMUNES FRANCOPHONES		
			BE336	BEZIRK VERVIERS – DEUTSCH-SPRACHIGE GEMEINSCHAFT				
			GERMANY	DEA2	KÖLN	DEA2D	STÄDTEREGION AACHEN	
						DEA26	DÜREN	
						DEA28	EUSKIRCHEN	
						DEA29	HEINSBERG	
		DEB2		TRIER	DEB23	EIFELKREIS BITBURG-PRÜM		
					DEB24	VULKANEIFEL		
		NETHERLANDS	NL42	PROVINCIE LIMBURG	NL422	MIDDEN-LIMBURG		
					NL423	ZUID-LIMBURG		
		Strand	Cross-border cooperation (A)					

1. Programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area

Institutional areas

The Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) was established in 1976 and constitutes one of the oldest cross-border cooperative ventures operating at cross border level in the European Union. In 1991, the partnership was institutionalised by the establishment of the EMR Foundation, which developed into a EGTC EMR in 2018. The EGTC EMR is formed by five regions: the Dutch province of Limburg, the Belgian provinces of Limburg and Liège, the German-speaking community in Belgium and the German Region Aachen Zweckverband.

However, in the Interreg programme, these core members are joined by the Eifelkreis Bitburg-Prüm and the Landkreis Vulkaneifel from Rhineland-Palatinate. These seven regions together form the core area of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine programme. Cross-border cooperation between these regions (including the privileged partnerships) has offered new opportunities, that contributed to the quality of life of the over four million people living in the area.

Functional areas

The new Interreg period 2021-2027 is a critical moment to reassess joint characteristics, common challenges and development potentials for cross-border cooperation. In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths, the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) programme should not be strictly limited to the administrative borders of the programme. That is why within a select number of specific objectives a more flexible geographic area will be addressed depending on the topic.

These are the so-called **functional areas**. A functional area is generally characterised by interdependencies or links within territories. In Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), there are functional areas foreseen within the priorities:

1. A smarter Meuse-Rhine-area;
2. A greener, low-carbon Meuse-Rhine area;
3. A more social Meuse-Rhine area;
4. Better cooperation governance in the Meuse-Rhine area.

A specification and justification of the geographic areas covered functional areas is included in the appropriate sections in chapter 2.

1.2. Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other forms of support, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

Main joint challenges based on documents and partners' inputs

Through the implementation of five consecutive Interreg programmes, cross-border cooperation in the programme area is based on a long tradition. Numerous projects carried out in the border area have enabled the development and consolidation of good cooperation structures.

For the new programming period 2021-2027, the programme area is faced again with the challenge of setting priorities and objectives for the next seven years, based on concrete needs and societal challenges. This led to the formulation of five grand societal challenges with a cross-border impact on the entire programme area.

- Industrial Transition;
- Green Transformation;
- Healthier inhabitants;
- Tourism in a High-Quality Region;
- Live and Work without Borders.

The programme partners consider it important not to leave activities in the 2021-2027 programme to chance, but to be clear about the societal challenges where further development of the programme area should take place or where added value can be achieved. These societal challenges will receive special support with the help of Interreg.

These include challenges relating to climate adaptation, innovative capacity and digitalisation, as well as challenges relating to the quality of life and cooperation in the programme area. Think about cross-border barriers in the labour market, healthcare, education, security and language use. For each topic, the aim is to bring together relevant actors at all levels in order to actively seek ways to reduce the barriers identified, or to facilitate the exploitation of untapped potential.

General starting points for the choice of the new priorities and (specific) objectives are that they:

- focus on leveraging strengths and opportunities with potential of the programme area to overcome weaknesses and threats,
- anticipate future cross-border challenges,
- effectively address the societal challenges in the programme area,
- are tailored to the needs of the actors and inhabitants in the programme area,
- attract many and new actors to cross-border cooperation and to involve them in the programme's implementation.
- take into account the findings and recommendations in external sources such as the country-specific recommendations for Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands and the border orientation paper for the EMR of the European Commission, as well as the socio-economic analysis and SWOT,
- have been based on input from the programme partners and public and private stakeholders, which has emerged in an iterative process.

This 2021-2027 programme is the translation of the European objectives into the specific challenges of the programme area. It is the joint strategy of the partners to achieve key developments in the programme area over the next seven years and to guide the joint cross-border development of the programme area into one of the most intelligent, sustainable and inclusive regions of excellence in Europe.

Below is the route that leads to the joint development strategy.

(i) Economic, social and territorial disparities

The programme area is in many ways an area with strong cross-border relations and interactions. It is also an internationally oriented region with many opportunities to develop into a leading knowledge economy, including through the presence of four renowned universities, several colleges, university hospitals, leading knowledge and research institutes, campuses and a wide range of relevant economic sectors. The innovation area in which the programme area is embedded is even bigger and includes the Eindhoven-Leuven-Aachen (ELA)-triangle, a well-known and strong innovation tripolar hotspot on European level, with leading knowledge in topics such as health and life sciences, photonics, biobased materials, and chemical technology. These 'knowledge factories and boosters' play a key role in the business climate and economic development of the region.

Overall, the programme area scores particularly well regarding publications (public or non-public) and R&D expenditure. In terms of R&D intensity (measuring R&D as a percentage of GDP at NUTS-2 level, the programme area is above the EU average (Border Orientation Paper EMR, European Commission). Yet, the region scores significantly lower in terms of applications, so the valorisation of knowledge. The cross-border challenge here is to **increase the market uptake of innovation activities by SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups**. Overall, the number of enterprises and start-ups in the programme area has increased in recent years, mainly as a result of the flourishing economy. The sectoral structure is fairly similar in the partner regions with wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, professional, scientific and technical activities, and financial and insurance activities as dominant sectors. This business climate represents an innovative, stable and healthy economy with low levels of unemployment.

However, it is noticeable that there is an **underrepresentation of sectors such as ICT and business services**. These are the sectors that have shown the strongest productivity growth in recent years in metropolitan areas. It is supposed that ICT and business services will continue to be a driver of growth. For the programme area, it is therefore vital to not miss the boat in a forward-looking digital economy in which important jobs can be created and productivity can be improved.

The recent COVID-19 crisis shows that the good economic position can also be quickly wiped out again, with rising unemployment and a rise in the number of bankruptcies. This presents the programme area with a major challenge to **revitalize the economy and develop new business models** to get back on a growth path. In that, we want to pay attention to specific sectors that have been hit hard, such as the creative and cultural sectors, as long as the developments have a clear link with the programme's objectives.

In this context, the programme area has a lot of potential and a wide-ranging network of companies and knowledge institutes that, together with their spin-offs and spin-outs, occupy a leading position in innovation. Moreover, its strong industrial base and supporting services companies and research institutes provides a great opportunity to develop current industries into 4.0 level companies.

In addition, the region has a **strong logistics infrastructure**, with (cargo) airports and multimodal ports and terminals. This facilitates the region's strong industrial base, through the fast and effective distribution of manufactured goods.

These regional characteristics are combined with a strong common historical and cultural base. The programme area is characterised by a special and exciting combination of urban and rural areas, factors that can strongly contribute to the attractiveness of the region for people and businesses. According to the Well-Being Index of the OECD (2016), the Meuse-Rhine area especially scores higher than average on safety, civic engagement, community and life satisfaction. This indicates the region offers a **pleasant living environment** to its inhabitants and makes the region attractive to overnight and day visitors. Cross-border cooperation shall support the development of the territory into a leading knowledge-based economy and at the same time better open up the territory as a whole.

Despite the fact that the Meuse-Rhine area is a region with great strength and a pleasant living environment, the region is characterised by a number of disparities and it faces various challenges in the near future. From an economic perspective, the GDP per capita can act as an understandable indicator of living standards. Although the GDP per capita of the programme area is increasing, it is **losing its comparative advantage** to the EU-27. This is due to the fact that the average productivity growth of the EU-27 has increased relatively more than in the programme area. This observation strengthens the regional partners' ambition to continue the development of an internationally oriented Meuse-Rhine area into a **leading innovation region**, spurring new competitiveness, productivity and economic growth from which all sectors, businesses and income groups can benefit.

A crucial aspect within this joint challenge is to address the implications of **an ageing population** for the labour market across the programme area. The potential labour force is declining, with an even faster increasing number of people in retirement age. The rapid decline of the potential labour force and loss of experienced workforce will become a serious problem for employers in the near future. In short, **retaining and inspiring talented people** is key to ensure future economic growth and keep the employment structure healthy. A substantial part of the solution is to accelerate ongoing cross-border exchanges in various ways to **stimulate cross-border labour mobility** in the programme area and beyond. In addition to that, there is a need of increased and focussed investments in educational systems and **life long learning** throughout the programme area.

In terms of **mobility**, the car accessibility of the programme area is well developed with travel times to the most neighbouring cities within a 30 to 45 minute car drive. Still, public transport remains an important area of concern. Although public transport is well organised within each country, it takes too much time to travel across borders. For example, it takes two hours by bus from Hasselt to Aachen, while the car drive is less than one hour. Different technical, political and administrative orientations of public transport means hamper further development of cross-border regional public transport. This **lack of accessible public transport across borders** is a constraint on the economic growth and social cohesion and shows in practice that the frontier between member states still exists. Accordingly, the programme area is motivated to continue to invest in better coordination of cross-border public transport and also in streamlining the ticketing system.

When it comes to renewable energy and greenhouse gases, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands are all three lagging behind on EU-27 average emission numbers. However, all three countries are making

progress in the rise of the share of renewables and decline of greenhouse gases. Considerable efforts are needed to meet the commitments of the Paris Climate Agreement. Particularly in the border region, areas and local communities suffer from the presence of the border and potential cross-border synergies are not fully exploited. In order to further accelerate the energy transition on a regional scale, one of the biggest cross-border challenges is to ensure better cross-border interconnection of regional/national electricity systems to enhance security of supply and to integrate more renewables into energy markets. Besides a more efficient energy system, increased cross-border transmissions reduce overall system costs and CO₂ emissions. This goes hand in hand with **energy efficiency** and improvement of **resource efficiency** as a boost to economic growth and more generally in the reduction of CO₂ emissions. More focused cross-border cooperation in this field is essential towards sustainable economic growth. The considerable research and innovative power in the region in the field of renewables offers many possibilities to open up and exploit new market niches if we collaborate and invest across borders.

Furthermore, cities and towns across the region are increasingly being forced to mitigate the risks and consequences of events related to climate change. As a densely populated area with critical infrastructure such as transport networks, power grids, water supplies and substantial building stock, the programme area is vulnerable to extreme weather events, which add to and interact with the wide range of existing risks already present in the region. Given this fact, new cross-border strategies with cost-efficient **climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction** measures are required to manage future climate risks and **enhance disaster resilience**.

(ii) Joint investment needs and complementarity Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) with other forms of support;

The programme partners have the ambition to strengthen the region's leading position in knowledge and innovation, with the aim of generating societal, economic and environmental impact. Taking into account the provisions of the European regulations and the objectives of the partners, the Working Group 2021-2027 has carefully conducted the process of preparation of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), including the involvement of external stakeholders, thematic and content related experts and the general public. The main steps in the preparation process are discussed in chapter 4.

Both from the partners and from the external stakeholders the aim is to concentrate the strategic objectives of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) programme around a limited number of societal challenges in the border area, within which there is room for a multisectoral approach with a focus on the core sectors of the area. In this respect, these grand societal challenges count as the profile, ambition and storyline of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) programme to the outside world.

The Working Group 2021-2027 has further elaborated and developed this in subsequent steps, by further discussing the formulation of the grand societal challenges for the programme area and also with the aim of further rationalising the number of specific objectives.

This led ultimately to the selection of **five grand societal challenges** with a cross-border impact on the entire programme area and which also guides the allocation of resources from Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

- Industrial Transition;
- Green Transformation;
- Healthier inhabitants;
- Tourism in a High-Quality Region;

- Live and Work without Borders.

Further elaboration of these five grand societal challenges follows below. The mentioned examples are not limitative and merely an elaboration of the joint investment needs.

Industrial Transition

The process of industrial transition poses enormous challenges to the programme area and at the same time offers great opportunities to excel economically. However, to meet those challenges and seize the opportunities, substantial investments in advanced technologies and services, people's skills and talents, as well as research and innovation are required.

Promoting Industry 4.0 and key enabling technologies to facilitate the economy's industrial transition

Development and implementation of Industry 4.0¹ and key enabling technologies (KETs²) present enormous growth potential for businesses in the programme area. At the same time, these industrial developments have an economy-wide impact, challenging all sectors to a greater or lesser extent to reshape their processes and methodologies in a different, smarter way, in an eco-innovation logic. It goes without saying that companies in the programme area have a lot to do with these challenges. The effective development and adoption of advanced technologies takes long R&D-processes and high investment needs, or put differently, it requires 'patient money' and a long-term effort, involving many risks. That is why the programme partners want to invest in boosting digital technology and KETs, and the integration of physical and digital systems. KETs such as advanced manufacturing, industrial data, automation/robotics, 3D printing, Internet of Things, blockchain technologies, artificial intelligence, battery technology, green hydrogen, photonics, biotech, nanotech and nano-electronics, quantum technologies, iNew materials, innovative chemistry and process technology offer a range of opportunities that will enable the programme area to conquer a leading position in the emerging markets for the products and services of the future. The application and valorisation of these KETs offer businesses across the programme area new business opportunities, improving their competitive advantage to take full advantage of advanced technologies or innovative business models.

Advanced technologies and innovative businesses pave the way to a greener economy

Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies are key to modernizing the programme area's industrial base. At the same time, this industrial transition offers scope to organise and shape production processes, products and services in a greener way, by reducing CO₂ emissions and protecting the environment. The industrial transition, by promoting the development and implementation of KETs, will inevitably lead to an increased uptake of renewable energy and greening of production processes. The programme area has strong regional clusters in the fields of battery technology, integrated PV, green hydrogen, carbon-free synthetic fuels, smart grids, electrification of industry and heat and storage solutions. Businesses working on renewable energy solutions should leverage their own strengths in combination with innovation capacity across borders. This will create new business opportunities for sustainable economic growth. In fact, it will contribute to rising the share of renewables and declining the share of greenhouse gases in the programme area.

¹ Industry 4.0 is the ongoing automation of traditional manufacturing and industrial practices, using modern smart technology.

² KETs are a selected group of technologies that will allow European industries to retain competitiveness and capitalise on new markets.

Impact on labour market, education and lifelong learning

Industrial transition and demographic change will undoubtedly affect how people work and live in the programme area. These developments will make the labour market more dynamic and bring with them more diverse forms of work and new jobs, requiring new skills. To put it another way, innovation and industrial transition do not lead to fewer jobs, but to new forms of employment. In order to prevent a mismatch between qualifications of employees and the demands of employers, increased efforts are necessary to acquire, develop and utilize new skills (knowledge, talents and qualities). Matching based on skills is the future challenge, in order to develop the programme area towards a flexible labour market with equal opportunities. Moreover, the programme area has a strong potential for cross-border labour mobility. Such mobility can help to fill vacancies that are difficult to fill, reduce unemployment and skills mismatches and retain talented people for the long term.

On the demand side, skill requirements are changing rapidly, with enterprises, especially SMEs, struggling to find the talent they need. For industry, it is crucial to support new forms of education, as competition for in particular technically skilled talent will become even fiercer in the coming years. Therefore, education and training of sufficient technically skilled personnel is of paramount importance for the success of the industrial transition. On the supply side, knowledge and training institutions have to take responsibility to modernise their curricula, tailored to the needs of the industry. Reshaping curricula is a considerable challenge, implying complex decision-making processes and various administrative obstacles in the programme area. The new industrial age requires new ways of organising learning experiences of individuals and groups for Industry 4.0, in close collaboration between knowledge and training institutions and the industry. Also on the supply side, employees need to take personal responsibility for their learning trajectory and should be encouraged to embrace the concept of lifelong learning.

Green Transformation

Following the Paris Agreement and the Green Deal, Europe is increasingly seizing the opportunity to make a transition to a green society and economy, providing jobs and social benefits as well as protecting vital resources. However, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach for fostering greener growth. That is why the programme area requires a tailored approach to promote renewable energy, to mitigate the risks of climate change, to increase the uptake of circular concepts, and to foster a 'greener' labour market and education.

Increasing the share of renewable and clean energy

There is widespread support amongst programme partners for using renewable and clean energy, which provide electricity or heat without giving rise to any carbon dioxide emissions. Green entrepreneurs and renewable energy communities have to play a pivotal role in the transition towards a green society. These groups involve inhabitants, (social) entrepreneurs, public authorities and community organisations participate directly in the energy transition by jointly investing in, producing, selling and distributing renewable energy. Beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, there are many benefits for the programme area's society and economy involved, including economic development, the creation of new jobs, cheaper energy, providing a greater share of the programme area's own energy supply, community cohesion and energy security. In order to accomplish a fully green society in the programme area, the border region's challenge is to support the emergence of energy communities by providing financing, expertise and advice, and ensuring that regulatory issues can be easily understood and navigated. Moreover, the programme area harbours unique competences to make substantial progress on a cross-border scale in the innovation fields of energy storage and smart grids.

Addressing climate change and embracing a circular economy

Climate change and natural resource scarcity pose new challenges to the programme area. As a densely populated area with critical infrastructure the programme area is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, as the recent floodings during summer of 2021 have dramatically highlighted. Due to intense and prolonged rainfall, streams and rivers overflowed their banks in a large part of the programme area, resulting in enormous personal suffering and material damage. As a result of climate change, increasing flood risks as well as droughts are expected to occur more frequently in the Rhine and Meuse river basins. There are a number of sites that have been identified as having potentially significant flood risks. In particular, the project FLOOD-WISE (financed under Interreg IV-C) identified the areas at risk in the border area between Germany and the Netherlands. Moreover, research from the RWTH Aachen University has demonstrated that the three countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany) show distinct discrepancies in land use patterns, water management and the evolution of the cultural landscape. More cross-border cooperation and coordination is required to further develop permanent flood protection measures. At the same time, it is required to collect and store water better, so that in times of drought more water is available for watering crops and maintaining groundwater levels.

Climate change impacts range from an increase in extreme weather events and flooding to hotter temperatures, public health concerns, impact on nature and forests, and the impact of invasive species settling in the programme area due to the rise in temperature on agriculture and nature. The specific impact on each urban or rural area will depend on the actual changes in climate experienced, which will vary from place to place. Approaches to tackle climate change can range from highly technical and resource-intensive, to simple and inexpensive.

Climate change is inherently transboundary in character, as climate change effects do not stop at man-made borders and cannot be dealt with merely at a local, regional or even national level. However, climate adaptation solutions have been, up until now, a predominantly domestic responsibility. The programme partners are determined to change these deeply ingrained attitudes in favour of more effective joint climate adaptation. In other words, an ambitious and more proactive programme area-level intervention is well warranted. Even when climate change adaptation challenges are often local and specific, solutions are just as often widely applicable on a cross-border scale.

The same applies to circular economy. Challenge is to transform our economy into a circular one, and to make our energy supply more sustainable. We will have to learn how to continuously reuse natural resources and raw materials and reduce the production of waste until it (almost) no longer exists. The significant component of circular economy presents the creation of industrial symbiosis partnerships across borders on a (eu)regional scale, as a way of fostering economic development and enhancing environmental benefits for businesses. The presence in the programme area of large, leading companies in their sectors, with significant flows of raw materials, surrounded by ramified clusters of suppliers, their spin-offs and spin-outs, as well as leading knowledge institutes, offers a lot of potential to adopt new circular economy principles. By using the best available technology and unused or residual resources from different production lines, one creates mutual economic, social and environmental benefits for all the companies involved, as well as the community. The cross-border challenge is to accelerate the market uptake of innovation activities related to circular economy. Adopting circular economy principles by the regional industry and society is necessary to maximize value and eliminate waste by improving the design of materials, products, systems and business models.

Establishing a better match between green labour demand and education supply

Growing investments in the energy transition will go hand-in-hand with a substantially different labour demand in the programme area. According to the JRC study report titled 'Employment in the Energy Sector – Status Report 2020', sectors affected in terms of employment from the green transition include construction, electrical machinery manufacturing, mining of critical metals, renewable energy production, biomass crop cultivation, transport and services. Consequently, new 'green' jobs are created in the renewable sector as well as in the circular economy. Some existing jobs are redefined and require upgrading of workers' skills. In order to seize the opportunities for the economy in the programme area offered by the energy transition and to make it possible to contribute to Europe's climate objectives, it is essential for the programme area to anticipate the changing needs of the labour market. Consequently, the role of education, training and lifelong learning should be rethought in responding to the transition towards a green society and economy. Tackling these challenges requires an integrated approach to the labour market and education, in which companies, employees, educational and training institutes, and public authorities have a responsibility for building a sustainable economy with future-oriented jobs and education, which will benefit more people in the programme area.

Healthier inhabitants

Inhabitants of the programme area are on average less healthy than in other EU regions. Although the life expectancy of its inhabitants at birth is 81 years (Curvers et al., TSG Magazine for Health Sciences, 2019), which is equal to the EU-27 average in 2018 (Eurostat, Health statistics on regional level, 2021), other indicators, such as the mortality rate on certain diseases and the degree of obesity suggest that there is room to improve the average health level. The good quality of healthcare systems in the programme area can also be an explanatory factor for the fact that, despite the underlying problems, life expectancy is at the EU average, but at the same time there are health issues. It is vitally important to work on the health of the inhabitants, and to reverse the health level towards the average again, or even better, to a health level better than the EU-average. Cross-border cooperation is essential to address actual and future health challenges, and for joint development of innovative health solutions. This requires a multifaceted approach to increase the uptake of health innovations, to establish a better health labour market and education, and to improve the accessibility of healthcare services across borders.

New collaborations to support health innovations and entrepreneurs

As costs rise, resources shrink and inefficiencies abound in the European healthcare industry, a response of innovative technologies is emerging across Europe. In addition, healthcare plays an important role in the EU's economy, accounting for 8% of the total workforce and for 10% of its GDP, according to the European Investment Bank. As the programme area has a strong knowledge infrastructure on healthcare and life sciences, the programme area is particularly well equipped to put forward new solutions in the field of life sciences, health, therapeutics, diagnostics and medical devices. For example, pocket-size imaging devices, regenerative and personalised medicines, virtual reality that speeds healing in rehab and artificial intelligence spotting lung tumors. However, the valorisation and dissemination of this knowledge continues to be a problem in the programme area. Some examples of limiting factors are very long product cycles, regulation rigidity and pricing fluidity. That is why the programme partners are determined to support new collaborations across borders concerning new technologies, management models and further digitalisation in health care. This will bring groundbreaking benefits to patients and ensures universal access to high-quality and affordable health services in the programme area.

Promoting cross-border coordination and continuous learning in healthcare

There are specific challenges regarding the labour market when it comes to the health sector in the border area. Issues with diplomas and qualification certifications prevent health staff from one country to work in another country. More cross-border corporation and planning is required to achieve a more efficient health system in the programme area for the benefit of healthier inhabitants. In addition, there are specific challenges ensuring a high quality of education, training and lifelong learning in the health sector in the border area. Healthcare and cure are an ever-changing field of practice with advances in medicine, expanded evidence sources, new treatment options, and changing governmental regulations and models of care and cure. Continuous learning, education and lifelong learning is not optional in healthcare; on the contrary, it is required for healthcare workers to remain up-to-date on all developments and treatment options and to continue providing safe, effective patient care (also in a post COVID-19 situation). In fact, the lifelong learning movement in healthcare eventually provides benefit and welfare for everyone in society. The programme partners are convinced that more cross-border cooperation between schools and universities contributes to a continuous, increased knowledge uptake of our future health workers.

Ensuring access to quality, sustainable and affordable healthcare services

Our health systems are under pressure. Europe and the programme area in particular face the challenge of ageing populations and increasing demand for healthcare services, which can also result from non-demographic factors such as the emergence of new (often expensive) treatments. In addition, speed of change in society leads to problems of cognitive overload in people. Mental health problems lead to an increased demand for mental health services and thus increased costs for society. Furthermore, unexpected external shocks – such as the rapid spread of COVID-19 – put additional major pressure on our healthcare systems and show how vulnerable the sector is and, at the same time, how dependent we are on good healthcare. Against a background of rising demand for healthcare resources, and public budgets which are often under pressure, ensuring universal and timely access to high quality healthcare – whilst also guaranteeing the financial sustainability of health systems – is a challenge which requires increased efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme area's health systems and to explore new ways to prevent or cure diseases.

Tourism in a High-Quality Region

The programme area possesses strong scenic qualities and a strong cultural heritage. Based on these strong qualities, the programme area has a reasonably well developed and diverse leisure offer. The region is also popular with overnight and day visitors from outside the region. However, the largest leisure movements and expenditures take place by residents of the programme area themselves, who enjoy the area's quality of life. Especially, cross-border day and shop tourism are well-developed. The tourism and leisure sector in its narrow definition represents about 5% of total employment in the programme area (Eurostat, 2018). If the indirect employment effects for sectors such as retailing, services, traffic, logistics and construction that benefit from tourism movements and expenditures are included, the importance of the leisure sector is double-digit and shows its strategic importance for the programme area's economy and its capacity to address socio-economic challenges, including the provision of employment opportunities.

In response to the globalisation of tourism, a growing movement has emerged that emphasises the reduction of emissions and other harmful effects, i.e. greater attention to sustainability and the environment. As a result, interest in undertaking tourist activities in one's own region is growing. The current COVID-19 period has inevitably provided an incentive for leisure activities in one's own region. Fortunately, the programme area still has plenty of tourist potential to grow.

The challenge for the tourism sector in the programme area is to (continue to) provide a high quality and distinctive offer. This means that it is important to invest in innovation and sustainability of the supply, both in breadth and depth. From an economic point of view, the challenge is to entice visitors and holidaymakers visiting the region to spend more on tourism during their stay, so that more added value can be generated in the region. This can be achieved, for example, by presenting a more diverse euregional offer, or by extending the length of stay. This requires the increase of the competitiveness and resilience of the sector and the development of new earning models. By better cooperation between the various subareas and tourist hotspots, based on a better aligned or, where of added value, a joint approach, the programme area's leisure offer can be sharply and distinctively presented.

Live and Work without Borders

This grand societal challenge is aimed at improving the quality of life for the programme area's residents in the broadest sense of the word, by reducing or removing border barriers and improving cross-border cooperation. It is about making the programme area more attractive and functional for its inhabitants, including topics like culture, public transport and public safety. This also includes improving the functioning of the cross-border labour market for those sectors that cannot be classified under the previous societal challenges. All the challenges outlined on both the demand and supply side of the labour market in the areas of education, training and life-long learning are relevant here. Another challenge that requires continued attention is mutual language learning, at a time when pupils in schools are increasingly learning only English as a foreign language. The importance of being able to communicate in each other's languages both in everyday life and in the professional context is evident.

Improving legal and administrative cooperation

Despite the successive implementation of five Interreg programmes, the initiatives that have been taken repeatedly confirm that differences in terms of legal systems, public and private services, education and the labour market still exist and they do not make cross-border cooperation easy. The challenge for the Interreg Meuse-Rhine 2021-2027 programme remains to reduce or overcome border obstacles with which actors in the programme area face, whether it be inhabitants, businesses or public authorities. These obstacles have a negative impact on the free movement of people, goods and services and thus hinder economic and social interaction across the border(s). The challenge is to achieve a better mutual cooperation, on topics like safety, climate, environment, and to achieve a degree of cooperation that goes beyond the level of information exchange. Ultimately, this grand societal challenge is about making life in the programme area better and easier.

In pursuing these challenges, all investments under all policy objectives will ensure respect for fundamental rights and compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, equality, gender equality, non-discrimination (based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation), and accessibility in all stages of programming and implementation. In practice, this will be reflected in the selection procedure and criteria.

The objectives of the programme are in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is expected that the programme will contribute in particular to SDGs 3 (Health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 9 (Industry and innovation), 12 (Responsible production and consumption) and 13 (Climate action).

(iii) Lessons learnt from past experience

Territorial cooperation is well established in the programme area. The new 2021-2027 programme builds on the results and experiences of the previous programmes. These former Interreg programmes have laid a good basis for cross-border cooperation in the programme area. There is a wealth of experience in developing and implementing cross-border projects. Experiences that should be cherished and valued.

Nevertheless, evaluations, stakeholder conferences and practical work experience have produced a number of recommendations for the new programme period:

- Ensure that the various guiding documents for Interreg VI are ready on time, manageable for beneficiaries and consistent with each other. In order to do so, the preparatory processes for implementing Interreg VI has been started earlier in time. Goal is to work out a single programme manual for applicants and beneficiaries, and to have that in place before the actual programme implementation starts.
- Improve the general understanding of the intervention logic approach on the programme level, in order to build a better link from programme level to projects. Further, a project's contribution to the programme intervention logic in the application form needs revision and has to be clarified.
- Reformulate the selection criteria to a lean set of unambiguous and proper selection criteria, both for applicants and for the ones who have to assess applications.
- Organise a more efficient distribution of tasks and responsibilities between MA/Joint Secretariat and the Regional Antennas (RAs).
- Make use of all the SCOs that have been mentioned in the regulations and avoid 'gold-plating' (additional rules) where possible.
- Provide an up-to-date monitoring system, with an intuitive design, for both the application and reporting processes and ensure better guidance and support channels for the monitoring system.

(iv) Macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies

Not applicable.

(v) Synergy and complementarity with other EU programmes

The objectives of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) build on the existing structures in the programme area. The programme also continues a tradition of cross-border cooperation, which arose from the implementation of five Interreg programmes prior to the 2021-2027 period.

In these previous Interreg programmes, numerous cross-border projects on a wide range of topics have been carried out, which made a solid contribution to solving all kinds of cross-border challenges. All this has contributed to getting to know each other better and to reducing the barrier effect of the border. In these successive programmes, a sound Interreg structure has been created and cooperation between public authorities, with the business community and with societal institutions has been institutionalised, actively stimulating and facilitating cross-border cooperation. Thus, the preconditions are in place to build on the legitimacy, experience and expertise of the existing partnerships.

However, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is not alone in meeting its challenges. The programme fits into a broader spectrum of (European) programmes and instruments. To guarantee the added value of each programme, good cooperation between these programmes and instruments is important. When the programmes are aware of each other's content and focal points, synergies can be created and

complementarities achieved. Although many programmes work partly on the same priority axes as Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), each programme has its own unique selling points. For Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) this is the cross-border character that each project possesses, in the trilateral setting of the Meuse-Rhine region. Interreg can for instance be used as an instrument to make projects within one of the comparable priority axes in another, nationally oriented programme look "across the border" and thereby offer a valuable supplement. It is of course not impossible for other programmes to develop or add cross-border elements. However, as this is the unique selling point of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and most of the knowledge and experience about the cross-border context is available in this region, such projects fit best in this programme.

It is particularly important to coordinate the various EU incentive and grant instruments, as this makes a significant contribution to their optimal use and complementarity. Obviously, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) maintains contacts with various other programmes, either directly or through the programme partners involved, with the aim of actively ensuring synergies. Synergies and complementarities may arise in the following programmes and thematic priorities, although the themes listed below are not exhaustive and may be subject to change since not all programmes have yet been approved:

- ERDF programmes under the Investment for Jobs and Growth goal
 - South Netherlands focuses in its RIS3 on five transitions, being 1) energy, 2) climate, 3) raw materials, 4) agriculture&food and 5) health, coming together in three priorities on research & innovation (SO 1.i), generation of renewable energy (SO 2.i) and the development of smart energy systems (SO 2.iii). In particular transitions 1, 2, 3 and 5 have a strong synergy and complementarity with Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).
 - North Rhine-Westphalia focuses on a broad array of goals under research & innovation, including SMEs (SOs 1.i, 1.ii, 1.iii and 1.iv), and the low-carbon economy, with the aim of reducing of CO₂ emissions (SOs 2.i, 2.iii, 2.iv, 2.vi, 2.vii and 2.viii). On the topics of research and innovation and the low-carbon economy (in particular renewable energy, climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, as well as circular economy), there are good possibilities for building synergies and complementarity.
 - Rhineland-Palatinate focuses on a more competitive and smarter Europe (SOs 1.i and 1.iii) , as well as on a greener, low-carbon and resilient Europe (SOs 2.i and 2.iii.). In particular the topic of research and innovation, including enhancing innovation and sustainability in SMEs, has good opportunities for synergies and complementarity.
 - Flanders focuses on two content priorities, being 'Smart Flanders' and 'Sustainable Flanders', further elaborated in the selection of SOs 1.i, 1.ii and 1.iv under 'Smart Flanders' and SOs 2.i, 2.ii, 2.iv and 2.viii under 'Sustainable Flanders'. The topics of research and innovation and the low-carbon economy (in particular renewable energy and climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience) pose good opportunities for building synergies and complementarities.
 - Wallonia aims on all five main EU policy objectives, under which the SOs 1.i, 1.iii, 2.i, 2.vi, 2.vii, 3.ii, 4.ii and 5.i have been selected. In particular on research and innovation, including SMEs, circular economy and education, training and lifelong learning there are good opportunities for building synergies and complementarities.
- Investment for Jobs and Growth goal under ESF+, operational in:
 - Netherlands,
 - North Rhine-Westphalia,
 - Rhineland-Palatinate,
 - Flanders,
 - Wallonia and Federation of Wallonia-Brussels,

- German-speaking Community of Belgium.

In principle, all these ESF+ programmes are aimed at improving the functioning and transformation of the labour market to contemporary needs. Generally, they also pay attention to education, training and lifelong learning, social inclusion and the strengthening of public and social institutions. However, in order to achieve synergy and complementarity, the target groups must always be carefully looked at, since some programmes focus partly or entirely on vulnerable groups of workers and jobseekers, where Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) does not focus on specific target groups.

- Interreg A Germany-Netherlands; this programme consists of four priorities and has selected as SOs 1.i, 1.iii, 2.iv, 2.vi, 4.i, 4.ii, 4.v, ISO 1.ii and ISO 1.iii. As the Germany-Netherlands programme has almost selected the same SOs as Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) (except SOs 2.ii and 4.vi), there are excellent opportunities for building synergies and complementarities, specifically for the southern parts of the Germany-Netherlands programme area and some of the functional areas specified in Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). This also requires a critical attitude/view to determine in which programme an initiative fits best.
- Interreg A Flanders-Netherlands has four priorities and has selected as SOs 1.i, 1.iv, 2.i, 2.ii, 2.iii, 2.iv, 2.vi, 2.vii, 4.i, 4.ii, 4.vi and ISO 1.i. There are good opportunities for synergies and complementarities on topics like research and innovation, renewable energy, climate change action, circular economy, labour market, education and training, tourism and working together across borders to reduce border obstacles.
- Interreg Greater Region has four priorities and has selected as SOs 2.iv, 2.vi, 2.vii, 4.i, 4.ii, 4.v, 4.vi, 5.ii, ISO 1.ii, ISO 1.iii and ISO 1.vi. Opportunities for synergy and complementarity are on topics like climate change action, circular economy, labour market, education and training, tourism and working together across borders to reduce border obstacles.
- Interreg B North West Europe has five priorities, which are 1) Climate and environment with SOs 2.iv and 2.vii, 2) Energy transition with SOs 2.i and 2.ii, 3) Circular economy with SO 2.vi, 4) Innovation and resilience with SO 1.i and 5) Inclusive society with SOs 4.i, 4.v and 4.vi. So, there are possibilities for synergy and complementarity on topics like climate change adaptation, renewable energy, circular economy, innovation and research, labour market, health care and tourism.
- Interreg B North Sea focuses on three spotlight themes, which will be addressed within four priorities, being 1) Robust and smart economies with SOs 1.i and 1.ii, 2) Green transition with SOs 2.i, 2.ii, 2.iii, 2.vi and 2.viii, 3) Climate resilience with SOs 2.iv and 2.vii and 4) Better governance with ISO 1.ii. Opportunities for synergy and complementarity are on topics like innovation and research, renewable energy, circular economy, climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience and cross-border cooperation to improve governance.
- Interreg Europe is a cooperation programme, with a pan-European focus. It has chosen 'A better cooperation governance', with only ISO 1.i, as its single, overarching programme objective. This enables the programme to support actions to enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities and other stakeholders, on a broad variety of themes. This objective connects the programme with other EU-initiatives, including Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). Particular opportunities and synergies are possible on topics such as climate change adaptation and resilience actions, labour market and education, health care and working together to reduce border obstacles.
- Other funds covered by the CPR
 - Just Transition Fund; this programme is aimed at empowering specific regions and people to deal with the social, economic and environmental impacts of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe. Potential overlap between Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and JTF programmes in the three Member States would require areas eligible for JTF in the Meuse-Rhine programme area of at least two Member

States. So far, only in Germany the Düren area, Heinsberg area and CityRegion of Aachen cover areas also eligible for JTF. For Belgium, only areas outside the Meuse-Rhine programme area are eligible for JTF. Should there also be eligible areas in NL-Limburg, the possibilities for synergy and complementarity will be considered (especially on SOs 2.ii and 2.vi), but might be rather limited due to the very specific geographic focus under JTF.

- European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF); this programme focuses on the fisheries or aquaculture sector. As these are not priority sectors in the programme area, as well as the fact that the programme area is located far from sea basins, the relevance for synergy and complementarity with Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is considered very low.

- Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); this fund may be relevant for synergy and complementarity with regard to ISO 1 to the extent that projects deal with topics such as asylum, migration and integration, but then only in a cross-border context for the programme area Interreg Meuse-Rhine.

- Internal Security Fund; this fund may be relevant for synergy and complementarity with regard to ISO 1 to the extent that projects deal with topics such as security, tackling radicalisation, terrorism, cybercrime, organised crime and protecting victims of crime, but then only in a cross-border context for the programme area Interreg Meuse-Rhine.

- Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy; the BMVI may be relevant for synergy and complementarity with regard to ISO 1, as far as projects focus on the topic of common visa policy. The relevance for Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is considered very low. BMVI's second objective focused on integrated border management is not considered applicable for Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

- Cohesion policy instruments in a large sense:

- InvestEU is a European programme to unleash a new wave of investments to boost innovation and jobs in Europe. Although the focus on innovation and employment is partly identical to Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), InvestEU involves large-scale investments, which are realised through long-term funding. The possibilities of synergy with Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) are therefore considered very low.

- European Recovery and Resilience Facility; the RRF is the EU's core component of NextGeneration EU. RRF is aimed to help the economic and social recovery after the coronavirus pandemic, promoting sustainable and inclusive recovery. All Member States have been invited to come up a National Recovery and Resilience Plan, focusing on country-specific challenges. Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands have all submitted their plans. The Dutch plan is still waiting for approval by the Council. Broadly speaking, the demarcation, size and duration of investments as part of the RRF differ substantially from a cross-border Interreg programme. The RRF usually involves large-scale investments or other financially substantial interventions or actions, with a focus on strengthening the national economy. The cross-border context has not or only very marginally been taken into account when drawing up the national plans. The RRF is therefore assessed as being of low relevance in terms of synergy and complementarity with Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

- Rural development programmes funded by the EAFRD across the programme area; for these programmes, synergy and complementarity is possible on topics like innovation (in agriculture), climate change action, circular economy (providing biobased, sustainable inputs), and socio-economic development in rural areas, including tourism.

- Horizon Europe 2021-2027 is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, also tackling climate change, helping to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and to boost the EU's competitiveness and growth. Its Strategic Plan 2021-2024 outlines the key strategic orientations and expected impacts, as well as the new missions and partnerships. Of the four key strategic

orientations, A) Promoting an open strategic autonomy by leading the development of key digital, enabling and emerging technologies, sectors and value chains, C) Making Europe the first digitally enabled circular, climate-neutral and sustainable economy and D) Creating a more resilient, inclusive and democratic European society offer the most connection and opportunities for synergy and complementarity with Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). Topics like industry leadership, excellence in science, support for public-private partnerships in order to build a better connection between knowledge and educational institutions and businesses on key enabling technologies are good examples where synergies do exist, especially in priorities 1 and 2 of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). However, in Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) the connection with industry is always central and the focus should be on applied innovation, close to the market. Low TRL levels focusing on scientific research (programmes) and the first phase of industrial development fit better within Horizon Europe.

- Erasmus+ is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. This makes Erasmus+ the most closely related to SO 4.ii of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). To fully exploit the potential synergies and complementarities with Erasmus+, contacts and cooperation with the National Agencies responsible for the implementation of Erasmus+ in the programme area will be established.
- For LIFE, synergy and complementarity are possible on topics such as climate change adaptation, renewable energy transition, circular economy and quality of life.

The partners in our programme are actively involved in the preparation and implementation of the various regional innovation strategies. Any updates and/or evaluations of these regional innovation strategies will be considered during the implementation of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). This ensures the coherence with the various regional innovation strategies during the lifetime of the programmes and into the future.

A network is also built up and maintained with the various programmes. For example, there is the possibility for staff members of the programme authorities to work with the national contact points of different programmes and thus gather experience and knowledge. The aim is to provide optimal advice to potential project implementers so that they can be directly referred to the right entry point.

At programme level, the mutual participation of programme representatives in the Monitoring Committees and/or Steering Committees of other programmes is put into practice. The MA proposes to set up a specific working group consisting of programme partner representatives around the topic of synergy and complementarity with other EU programmes. Not only programme partners build and maintain a broad network, this also applies to project beneficiaries. Several project partners will be active in several programmes. In previous programme periods, for instance, knowledge and educational institutions have also been active in Horizon 2020 and previous programmes. Through this accumulated and future experience, project partners can also generate synergies that arise from being project partners in other programmes.

In any case, as part of the guidance and selection process of applications, synergy and complementarity will be carefully considered, also to exclude double funding of the same activities.

Above all, a key feature of Interreg remains the requirement for cross-border cooperation. This unique and essential component distinguishes Interreg from other programmes and funds. Within Interreg VI, regular coordination takes place with the various programmes within the framework of the INTERACT European network. Bilateral (evaluation) discussions also regularly take place with other programmes, for example with the Interreg A Germany-Netherlands, the Interreg A programme Flanders-Netherlands and

the Interreg A programme Greater Region. Where possible, joint efforts are made in the areas of communication, information and evaluation, such as when launching procurement procedures on the market.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
PO 1 – A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity	1.i Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	A smarter Meuse-Rhine area	By choosing specific objective 1.i, the programme partners intend to make better use of its strong technological knowledge position on key technologies such as digital technologies, photonics, advanced and at the same time sustainable materials, biotech, chemical technology and nanotech within the strongly represented clusters of manufacturing industry and life sciences & health. Other sectors are not excluded. Moreover, the programme area possesses leading knowledge and research institutes, as well as several world leading innovation campuses. Research and innovation has always been a successful and ‘broad’ priority in previous programmes. The programme partners intend to build on previous efforts, by trying to develop and attract new technologies and also to apply the knowledge present in the grand societal transitions in the fields such as Industry 4.0 and Health. By doing so, the programme area is taking into account the innovative characteristics of the region and the current and future potential of specific areas.
PO 1 – A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity	1.iii Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments	A smarter Meuse-Rhine area	The choice for this specific objective has been fuelled by the fact that statistics such as the Regional Innovation Scoreboard show that substantial gains can be made in the valorisation of knowledge and innovations by SMEs. That is why the main focus is put on the cross-border valorisation of knowledge within more advanced forms of innovation collaboration, ultimately benefitting SMEs and start-ups. These enterprises (99% of total number of enterprises) play a key role in bridging the innovation gap from lab to market. In this way, the programme responds to the need of SMEs to stimulate promising innovations and mutual cooperation within the designated grand societal themes.
PO 2 – A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net	2.ii Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Directive	A greener, low-carbon Meuse-Rhine area	Closely linked to the Green Deal, this specific objective focuses on promoting cross-border renewable energy solutions in the programme area. Increasing the share of renewable energy in the regional energy mix mitigates climate change and is key to contribute to the EU’s binding targets. Moreover, investments

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
zero carbon economy and resilient Europe	(EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria set out therein		<p>in renewables projects can lead to benefits in terms of cross-border employment, lower greenhouse gases emissions, improved air quality, modernisation of the energy system and reduced dependency on imports. In short, investing in promoting renewable energy draws significant benefits to the environment as well as to the economic growth and resilience of the programme area.</p> <p>In addition to that, programme partners have underlined the vast amount of potential synergy gains between the innovative power of SMEs and tackling the challenges of the energy transition. The programme area is particularly well-suited when it comes to developing battery technology, integrated PV, 'Power 2 Molecules' (e.g. green hydrogen and carbon-free synthetic fuels), cross-border energy grids, electrification of industry and heat and storage solutions. The large-scale implementation of these technologies requires new quadruple helix partnerships in a crossborder context. In addition, there is regional potential (see the 'Trilateral strategy for the chemical industry') to adjust production processes and to integrate installations on large chemical plants, in order to reuse energy and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will allow the chemical industry to blend renewables in the energy mix and to develop chemical processes that are adapted to the fluctuating energy supply.</p>
PO 2 – A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe	2.iv Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	A greener, low-carbon Meuse-Rhine area	<p>This specific objective focuses on promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, mitigating the risks and consequences of events related to climate change. Climate change is increasingly affecting the programme area, both urban and rural areas. The challenge is to make the densely populated programme area more resilient to the severe impacts and risks of climate change on society, the built environment, agriculture and the landscape, taking a comprehensive risk reduction and disaster resilience approach. Where there are dense concentrations of households and economic activities, risks exacerbated by the effects of climate change can affect large number of people and have a major impact on cross-border economies – even if they affect only relatively small land areas.</p> <p>Taking climate measures in the programme area also means taking advantage of opportunities that may arise from climate change. If appropriate climate actions are developed across borders, it provides the opportunity to build large-scale resilience in a relatively cost-effective manner. In fact, a more</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			climate-friendly economy would generate new economic value and jobs according to studies carried out by the UN. Take for instance, companies aiming to improve their resource productivity, developing products and services addressing climate change. Or to give more attention to consistent material flow management, to develop climate-friendly production processes. These actions can foster competitiveness and unlock new market opportunities, turning climate risks into green opportunities for cross-border solutions and cooperation.
PO 2 – A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe	2.vi Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	A greener, low-carbon Meuse-Rhine area	<p>This specific objective involves promoting circular solutions provided by businesses in a crossborder context. Transitioning towards a circular economy can bring net benefits in terms of reduced material inputs and associated labour and energy costs, as well as reduced carbon emissions along entire supply chains. The programme area holds considerable potential for innovation and demonstration projects focusing on: re-using (natural) resources, closing resource and material cycles (e.g. in agriculture and construction), introducing or upscaling circular or biobased economy solutions, or reducing waste and increasing circularity in the healthcare sector.</p> <p>Particularly the material-intensive industries like the chemical, automotive and construction sectors, will benefit from a cross-border transition towards a circular economy. Not only from an environmental standpoint, but also from a business perspective. Increasing demand for substitutes and materials that fit easily in sustainable closed cycles are potential game changers. Although the existing technological knowledge and the number of research projects for material recycling and sustainable chemicals have increased over the past few years, many of the newly developed technologies are far from being ready for industrial implementation. Joint demonstration projects closing resource and material cycles, generating less waste and creating additional added value are key for developing a competitive advantage.</p>
PO 4 - A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	4.i Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through	A more social Meuse-Rhine area	This specific objective involves enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and improving access to quality employment across borders. Accelerating cross-border cooperation with regards to increased labour mobility and improving the match between labour demand and education supply throughout the programme area is key to ensure workforce resilience and economic prosperity. The future of work in the Meuse-Rhine area requires three types of changes across the workforce: attraction of new talent on the one hand and upskilling, in which staff gain new skills to help in their current roles, and reskilling,

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
	developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy		<p>in which staff need the capabilities to take on different or entirely new roles on the other hand. These challenges are particularly acute concerning the Industry 4.0 transition. The industry will experience a magnitude of change because they often employ large numbers of people and because the predictable and repetitive nature of many operational tasks makes it particularly suitable for automation or digitisation</p> <p>Besides enabling the industrial transition, labour market measures are indispensable when it comes to moving towards a green society. In order to meet the future demand for 'green jobs' (e.g. construction/renovation workers, eco-construction specialists or sustainable energy engineers), workers require employment support and retraining.</p> <p>Additionally, the Border Orientation Paper has outlined specific challenges concerning the health sector. This sector is helped most when the recognition of diplomas and qualifications is harmonised between the three countries working together in the programme. National ambulance crews, for example, are currently not allowed to work across borders because of the issue of diplomas and qualification certificates. This is a major obstacle for a more efficient and resilient health sector in the programme area. This obstacle linked to legal aspects will be tackled in synergy with ISO 1.ii and where possible with neighbouring CBC programmes.</p>
PO 4 - A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	4.ii Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	A more social Meuse-Rhine area	<p>This specific objective focuses on improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders. With an ageing population (above EU average) and changing demands on the labour market, programme partners have stressed the importance of increased and focused investments in education, training and life long learning throughout the programme area. With 8 universities, 29 universities of applied sciences, and 265.000 students, the programme area is densely populated when it comes to bright-minded, young people and educational ecosystems. These conditions form a strong basis for an attractive environment considering access to education, training and lifelong learning. However, transitioning towards Industry 4.0 also requires an appropriate 'Education 4.0'. This is a desired approach to (lifelong) learning that aligns itself with the emerging fourth industrial revolution. For universities and higher education institutes to continue to produce successful graduates, they must prepare their students for a world where cyber-physical systems are prevalent across all industries. This means teaching</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>students about this technology as part of the curriculum, changing the approach to learning altogether, and using this technology to better improve the university experience. It also involves increased teaching in green skills and environmental awareness in order to achieve a green economy. Cross-border study programmes, diplomas and strategic actions focusing on mutual language learning will further improve the access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders.</p> <p>In order to better exploit the potential of our schools for reskilling and upskilling, we need learning formats that take into account the reality of adults' lives. Increasing digitalisation in the classroom is an important prerequisite and opportunity for this. New target groups could also be reached by making programmes more flexible.</p>
PO 4 - A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	4.v Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care	A more social Meuse-Rhine area	<p>This specific objective entails enhancing the equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable healthcare services across borders. Due to demographic and technological developments, the accessibility of health care facilities is under increased pressure in the border region. It is also a fact that the health of the programme area's inhabitants is on average below the European average. Strong and structural cross-border cooperation is necessary to overcome the challenge to improve the average health level. Due to the high density of knowledge institutions and hospitals in the health domain, there is a high potential for more cross-border cooperation in the area of health. For example, there is already a long lasting cooperation on emergency care in the Meuse-Rhine area since the late 1990s. However, there are still substantial differences in national health care systems regarding prices and reimbursements. These systemic differences still constitute obstacles for further deepening cooperation in cross-border emergency healthcare. This obstacle linked to legal aspects will be tackled in synergy with ISO 1.ii and where possible with neighbouring CBC programmes.</p> <p>Moreover, social change is forcing classic health systems to adopt a fundamentally different approach to care activities. For example, the aging population, the increasing medical-technological possibilities and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a healthcare system in full transition. New ways have to be explored to prevent diseases, tackling the social and environmental causes that are related to specific health problems in the programme area. In addition, there is a high</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			need for developing better diagnostics, more effective therapies and new models and technologies promoting healthy ageing and a healthy lifestyle.
PO 4 – A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	4.vi Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	A more social Meuse-Rhine area	<p>This specific objective focuses entirely on the grand societal challenge of ‘Tourism in a High Quality Region’. Tourism is not only a major economic factor in the Meuse-Rhine area, but it also creates opportunities for the inhabitants of the border region to meet and discover the people and the culture of their neighbours. The challenge is to provide a high quality and distinctive tourism and leisure offer. This requires coordinated actions in the programme area, providing pragmatic and economically viable opportunities to strengthen the tourism sector. Joint actions can catalyse better cooperation between actors responsible for widely dispersed tourist hotspots, leveraging mutual synergies, also addressing topics like social innovation, inclusion, soft skills and language.</p> <p>Put differently, innovative solutions in the tourism sector are needed to reinforce the resilience through training, competence and employment support, digitalisation of business models and tourism offers, social innovation³, strengthening entrepreneurship, sustainability, contemporary presentation of cultural heritage and transition to circular business models. In order to bring these aspects together, multi-thematic and cross-cutting actions must be supported to raise the profile of the programme area and enable tourism regions in the cross-border region to compete with other strong tourism regions in Europe. The ambition is that this approach contributes to a more holistic and coordinated focus on tourism for the programme area as a whole, intensifying the cooperation of tourism stakeholders, with more emphasis on the opportunities of tourism within the programme area, both for inhabitants of the area and for tourists from outside the programme area.</p>
PO 6 – A better cooperation governance	ISO 1.ii Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and	Better cooperation governance in the Meuse-Rhine area	This specific objective has been chosen to overcome or diminish border obstacles the programme area still faces. These border obstacles have a negative impact on the free movement of people, goods and services and thus hinder economic and social interaction across the border(s). Therefore, legal and administrative cooperation between civil and other public organisations can be improved, by organising the integrated and structural character. The challenge is to achieve a degree and

³ Social innovation in tourism is about connecting with people outside the immediate network, visiting acquaintances that are not obvious, meeting new suppliers, going off the beaten track.

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
	cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions		depth of cooperation that goes beyond the level of information exchange, with as a point on the horizon genuine cross-border policy coordination and investments based on joint policy agendas.
PO 6 – A better cooperation governance	ISO 1.iii Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions	Better cooperation governance in the Meuse-Rhine area	This specific objective addresses the encouragement of people-to-people actions, by, for, through and with inhabitants. This builds on the proven added value and experience gained under previous Interreg periods and encourages small-scale “people-to-people” initiatives between inhabitants, visitors, private organisations, NGOs and public entities. It intends to raise awareness for cross-border cooperation, to enhance the experience in the border area, to improve the quality of life of inhabitants of the programme area and to enhance mutual trust. Testing administrative topics in small-scale projects may also encourage new (categories of) beneficiaries to participate in the programme.

2. Priorities

2.1. A smarter Meuse-Rhine area

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

This priority aims at promoting innovation in the programme area, further strengthening the innovation system and increasing the exploitation of the innovation system. Stimulation of innovation is focussed mostly on the outlined grand societal challenges of Industrial Transition, Green Transformation and Healthier inhabitants.

☒ This is a NOT priority pursuant to a transfer under Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: 1.i.

1.i. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies

2.1.1.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The programme partners aim to strengthen the programme area's innovation system, innovation capacities and to increase the development, attraction, exploitation and valorisation of advanced technologies. As described in chapter 1, the Meuse-Rhine area has a strong technological knowledge position on key technologies such as digital technologies, photonics, advanced materials, biotech, chemical technology and nanotech within the strongly represented clusters of the manufacturing industry and life sciences & health. This strong knowledge position is anchored in leading large companies, 'hidden champions', a strong supplying and facilitating SME and strong knowledge and research institutions. In a cross-border context, it is important to bring the different players together and to learn from each other on how to deal with and exploit opportunities. The two societal challenges of Industrial Transition and Healthier inhabitants outlined in the strategy will be given a strong focus in strengthening the innovation system.

Industrial Transition

In the context of the societal challenge of Industrial Transition, we see that sectors are going through a transition, driven by digitisation and rapid developing KETs such as, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, automation/robotisation, industrial data, 3D printing, battery technology, green hydrogen, photonics, nanotech and nano-electronics, biotech, blockchain technologies, internet of things, quantum technologies, iNew materials and innovative chemistry and process technology. These industrial developments have an economy-wide impact, in other words they challenge all sectors to a greater or lesser extent to shape their processes and methodologies in a different, smarter way. Sectors where this is particularly evident are, for example, the aerospace industry, the automotive industry and the (high-tech) manufacturing and chemical industry. Other sectors are not excluded. The programme stimulates cross-border innovation in the light of this industrial transition, in order to increase innovation capacities and a more effective use and valorisation of the KETs. The focus is on 'scaling-up' actions between cross-

border partners. In that respect, we pay attention to integrating new knowledge, techniques and processes into SMEs and cross-industry collaborations. The so-called interoperability in the value chain must also be taken into account, making sure that new solutions can access, exchange and integrate information with current systems that are in use.

Healthier inhabitants

Also in the societal challenge of Healthier inhabitants the aim is to strengthen innovation capacities and the valorisation of knowledge, in order to ensure more effective and efficient care for the programme area's inhabitants. Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) stimulates activities to address the innovative challenges facing the health sector, including the development of new technologies and the further digitisation of care (e.g. e-Health services and applications, including e-care/remote care, Internet of Things for physical activity and ambient assisted living). With regard to the development of new technologies, we are thinking in particular of developing new diagnostic and therapeutic devices, personalised medicine and value based health care. With nano-technology new materials, nano-devices and effective systems can be developed, in order to improve disease diagnosis, as well as to develop therapeutic devices that can improve different diseases at different stages and for different age groups of patients.

The main challenge in health care is not the innovation, but the implementation. That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) puts emphasis on the cross-border implementation and valorisation of knowledge within more advanced forms of innovation collaboration, like development of applications, living labs and incubation centres, ultimately benefitting SMEs and start-ups. It is believed that by improving the valorisation of the knowledge present in the Meuse-Rhine area, and by stimulating an environment that helps with the sharing of data and making the time to market short, SMEs can benefit a lot. Especially, while they play a key role in bridging the innovation gap from lab to market. Therefore, the challenge is to include SMEs in both transitions.

Research and innovation has always been a successful and 'broad' priority in previous programmes. The programme partners intend to build on previous efforts, by trying to apply the knowledge present in the societal transitions in the fields of Industrial Transition and Health. By doing so, the programme area is taking into account the innovative characteristics of the region and the current and future potential of specific areas. We focus on areas in which both regions have a strong basis and potential for innovation. By focusing on the domains in which both regions have a strong base and potential for innovation specialisation (RIS3), added value can be achieved by exploiting economies of scale.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of actions are eligible for support:

- (further) development of innovations offering solutions to the grand societal challenges Industrial Transition and Healthier inhabitants, by supporting innovation and scaling-up projects between collaborating companies and/or knowledge institutions and/or healthcare organisations;
- market-oriented and/or cross-industry collaboration between SMEs and knowledge institutions (and possibly large companies) on innovative solutions within social transitions of Industrial Transition and Healthier inhabitants, in which public and private R&D capacity is linked. Examples include the (further) development of living labs, new (shared) facilities and instruments for innovation processes;
- (further) development of innovative cross-border value chains in order to market innovations within the transitions, taking into account the interoperability of the value chain;

- development of a value added integrated supply chain ecosystem, stimulating technological and collaborative innovations between the logistics and manufacturing industry;
- support for living labs, and demonstration projects in the real environment, in which companies, knowledge institutions and end users work together on innovations that contribute to the societal challenges;
- social innovation projects aimed at achieving social renewal within the two societal challenges central to this SO. Examples include renewal processes in the field of cooperation in companies, aimed at improving production, new ways of thinking about topics and making trend-breaking ideas tangible, but also in governments and elsewhere in society to promote social cohesion or dynamism in relation to technological innovation;
- personalised health care.

Specific objective 1.i focuses on innovations with a Technology Readiness Level starting at 4 (development phase) and continuing through to 9 (deployment phase) at the start of the project. It is important that projects have the prospect of achieving higher TRLs and that the societal impact can be demonstrated. All projects must have a clear cross-border added value.

Specific objective 1.i is explicitly not intended to finance research projects or programmes. Where relevant, attention will be paid to the Commission Communication 'A new ERA for Research and Innovation' and its policy objectives, including on Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, including priority areas for joint action in support of ERA.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	1.i.	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Number of enterprises	19	373
1	1.i.	RCO 02	Enterprises supported by grants	Number of enterprises	15	298
1	1.i.	RCO 04	Enterprises supported with non-financial support	Number of enterprises	4	75
1	1.i.	RCO 10	Enterprises cooperating with research organisations	Number of enterprises	5	94

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	1.i.	RCR 02	Private investments matching public support	Amount of private investments in €	€ 1,5 million	2020	€ 3,19 million	Monitoring system	Baseline based on 50% of contribution of private partners by end of 2020, to be attributed to 1.b in Interreg 5, rounded down.
1	1.i.	RCR 05	SMEs innovating in-house	Number of SMEs	90	2020	101	Monitoring system	Baseline based on 25% of number of enterprises receiving support in 1b in Interreg V by end of 2020. Target based on assumption that 90% of number of enterprises receiving support (RCO 1) under SO 1.i are SMEs and that 30% of them innovate in-house

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- SMEs - including innovative start-ups and scale-ups - are the main target group of Priority 1;
- Larger companies, as long as their involvement helps SMEs to innovate or reach the market;
- Knowledge and educational institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational and professional bachelor education institutions), also being good connectors. However, cooperation between SMEs and knowledge and research institutions is a prerequisite;

- Intermediary and cluster organisations;
- Civil society organisations (foundations, NGOs) in innovation projects can also act as beneficiaries in projects.

Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposals.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: research and innovation

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 1.i, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong research and innovation interdependencies**. In addition to the programme area, the below mentioned regions are an integral part of the functional area under SO 1.i. Accordingly, target groups located in these regions are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- COROP region Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant (NL);
- Leuven Arrondissement (BE);
- Düsseldorf, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Duisburg, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Koblenz, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Trier, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE).

Functional relations with Leuven Arrondissement and Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant in the field of research and innovation are largely based on a strong and long-lasting triple helix innovation partnership between Eindhoven, Leuven and Aachen (ELA triangle, with KU Leuven, TU/e, RWTH; Philips, imec, the cities of Leuven, Eindhoven and Aachen), later extended to Top Technology Region ELAt (with regional authorities from the programme area). These relationships led and still are leading to mutual investments, intense project cooperation and frequent cross-border mobility of staff within research and innovation projects. Generally, frequent high level contacts and concrete cooperation initiatives between Flanders and The Netherlands and Flanders and Nordrhein-Westphalia lead to cross-border alignment and to strategic cross-border cooperation in the key technology areas in which the region has a strong knowledge position.

Functional relations within the life sciences and health sector are particularly strong. In the field of regenerative medicine, KU Leuven, (Leuven-based researchers of) VIB (Flemish Institute of Biotechnology) and strong partners in Maastricht and Eindhoven form the main axis within the Dutch-Flemish RegMed XB programme. In the Belgian-Netherlands chapter of EIT Health, HealthHouse (Leuven), KU Leuven and imec participate alongside Brightlands Maastricht, Maastricht University, TU/e and Philips. KU Leuven shares different biomedical research lines with Biomed of University of Hasselt. University College Leuven-Limburg runs different education and research programmes in the field of health in Leuven Arrondissement and Belgian Limburg, with across-border links towards Dutch Limburg and Southeast Brabant. Examples of recent EMR health projects with participation from Leuven Arrondissement actors include WearIT4Health, GYM and Eurlipids. Many cooperation projects being undertaken in this field bear witness of a long-lasting tradition of euregional cooperation.

The same strong functional relationship on life sciences and health also applies to the broad city region of Düsseldorf; with the presence of a strong and diversified life sciences technology cluster it is a natural counterpart for the programme area. With an ecosystem of both bigger and smaller life sciences driven companies (type Monsanto, Bayer CropScience, Medtronic, Henkel), strong knowledge institutes (Heinrich Heine University and the Düsseldorf University Hospital) and a worldclass knowledge infrastructure (Düsseldorf Life Science Center), organisations based in the programme area will undoubtedly benefit in terms of new knowledge and increased critical mass of cooperation with players in the city region of Düsseldorf.

Functional linkages between the programme area and the Dutch-Flemish functional areas also exist with Düsseldorf in the regional specialisations of biotech, pharmaceuticals, nanotechnology, medical technology, chemistry, digital economy/transformation, with a strong presence in and around Düsseldorf of companies active in the field of mobile communication and industrial manufacturing. Thus, on both grand social challenges of industrial transition and health, there are good opportunities for intensifying mutual cross-border cooperation, where the core programme area would benefit from.

In the field of industrial transition, the Flemish expertise center Flanders Make with its branches in Leuven and Lommel links researchers and companies in Leuven Arrondissement and Belgian Limburg, whereas University College Leuven-Limburg has an expertise center on digital innovation. The Technology Campus Diepenbeek of KU Leuven creates strong links with engineering departments in Leuven. The innovation catalysts Sirris (Belgian expertise centre for the tech industry with offices in Leuven, Hasselt and Liège), and Agoria (employers federation from the tech industry with offices in Brussels, Hasselt and Liège) link companies in Leuven Arrondissement, Belgian Limburg and the Province of Liège.

The city region of Duisburg has a very similar history in coal mining and steel industry as large parts of the programme area. Both the industrial transformation process as the economic-societal transition are on-going for several decades, but interesting new developments are emerging in these transition areas, fitting in the programme area's regional specialisations. Mutual benefits are seen in sharing models and experiences from different areas in which a similar transformation is taking place ever more successfully (e.g. SALK).

The cities of Koblenz and Trier are mentioned as functional areas, because of their research and innovation capacities (both have a university and a university of applied sciences) and the cooperations that exist with the RWTH in Aachen and other knowledge institutes in the programme area. The active participation of their research and innovation institutions will probably also lead to easier inclusion of SMEs in the Eifel region, with the two Landkreise belonging to the programme area in the top-10 in Rhineland-Palatinate regarding the location of hidden champions. The Max-von-Laue Institute of Advanced Ceramic Material Properties Studies in Koblenz stands for an international and interdisciplinary approach to investigate the structure-property correlations of material structures and solutions for various components. Its Method and Analysis Center will contribute to a new generation of refractories, which can be applied in all kinds of products and processes in industries being in industrial transition, like the steel industry. Trier's knowledge institutions and campus are strong in life sciences, medical informatics and technology, environmental sciences, computational linguistics and digital humanities, intelligent technologies, digital automation, materials, engineering, and digital media and games. Relevant institutes for cooperation within specific objective 1.i are the Research Center for Small- and Medium Sized Enterprises, the Institute for BioGeoAnalytics, Environmental Sampling and Biobanks (IBU) and the International Health Care Management Institute (IHCI) and the Applied Material Flow

Management institute (IfaS). The knowledge institutions in Trier also have distinctive medical, pharmaceutical and biotechnological knowledge within the theme of Life Sciences.

Thus, all these regions are functionally linked with each other through the presence of strong and diversified knowledge and technology clusters and universities (of applied sciences). Based on proximity, socio-economic similarities, a historic tradition of cooperation and aligned smart specialisation strategies, various partners within this functional area are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in developing new technologies aimed at addressing societal challenges.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 1.i focuses on innovation and valorisation within the technology domains referred to in section 2.1.1.1. The programme focuses on innovation cooperation in the higher Technology Readiness Levels, but always before the market introduction phase. It is generally accepted that the use of financial instruments lends itself best to the phase in which one actor demonstrably has the financially viable business case. In the earlier innovation phases of development and demonstration, in combination with the setting of complex cross-border cooperation, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support.

However, the possibility will be kept open to reconsider the use of financial instruments in the course of the programme, if this is considered appropriate by the Monitoring Committee. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is left open, in particular for projects involving the highest TRLs. If this is opted for, a programme amendment will be submitted, including a shift in the form of financing (dimension 2 in table 5).

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.i.	010	€ 7.475.202
1	ERDF	1.i	012	€ 7.475.201
1	ERDF	1.i	028	€ 7.475.201

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.i	01	€ 22.425.604

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.i	33	€ 22.425.604

2.1.2. Specific objective: 1.iii.

1.iii. Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments

2.1.2.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

In order to further strengthen the innovative strength of the programme area, cross-border promotion of innovation and cooperation between SMEs is important. As a difference to specific objective 1.i, the emphasis under specific objective 1.iii lies on initiating direct cooperations between SMEs themselves. Knowledge institutes play a (secondary) role as potential knowledge providers under 1.iii. The aim is to strengthen the innovation and internationalisation potential of SMEs and reinforce their competitiveness and growth potential in the programme area on the short term.

Industrial Transition

As described under specific objective 1.i, several sectors are going through a industrial transition, driven by digitalisation and rapid developing KETs. Some examples of this digitalisation and rapid developing KETs are artificial intelligence, automation/robotisation, photonics, nanotech and nano-electronics, biotech and internet of things. But other economic sectors are not excluded, because they too are confronted with these changes. Basically, the rapid developing technologies and the following industrial transition challenges a wide variety of industrial sectors to a greater or lesser extent to reshape their processes and methodologies in a smarter way, thereby reducing CO₂ emissions and protecting the environment. At the same time, this provides companies with vast opportunities for the development of new products, processes and services. This applies specifically for SMEs, which normally adapt more quickly to changing circumstances. The programme aims to support innovation in the light of this industrial transition, in order to increase cross-border innovation capacities and stimulate cross-border cooperation between enterprises. We expect that the development of new innovations supporting the industrial transition generates new added value, growth and employment in the programme area.

Green Transformation

The overall demand and thrive for clean energy will lead to substantial changes greatly affecting SMEs in the programme area. In order to gain broad acceptance for the energy transition, the programme partners consider it important to facilitate the transition of SMEs to adopt green technologies and processes. SMEs will play a significant role in developing new business models, products, processes and services to suit the requirements of a sustainable society. Besides helping to drive the green transition in the programme

area, this focus on innovation in green technologies and processes also contributes to enhancing growth, competitiveness and resilience of SMEs.

Healthier inhabitants

SMEs are the main source of innovation in the health sector. As such, they are catalysts of growth and competitiveness. The medical technology industry in the programme area – one of the most innovative in Europe – is well positioned for healthy growth under this specific objective. Innovation in medical technology has the power to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of care, either by revolutionary steps in medical prevention, diagnosis and treatment, or by the application of innovative technology that is able to do more with less. Innovative technologies will provide the programme area and Europe with more sustainable healthcare delivery and a more competitive industry. To enhance growth and competitiveness of SMEs in the health sector, improving cross-border (innovation) collaboration between SMEs is required. SMEs engaging in cross-border relationships with external enterprises can complement their activities in improving their products and services in order to maintain their market share in a competitive landscape.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of actions are eligible for support:

- Development and implementation of an innovation scheme, stimulating sustainable cross-border development and cooperation on promising innovation projects between SMEs (business-to-business) within the framework of KETs defined under specific objective 1.i;
- Innovation projects adapting to changing circumstances, creating new solutions, generating new business;
- Digitalisation of products, processes and services (e-commerce and e-business);
- Cross-border innovation processes, technology transfer and business aimed at introducing new products and services to the market;

Specific objective 1.iii focuses on innovations with a Technology Readiness Level starting at 6 (final stage of development phase) and continuing through to 9 (deployment phase) at the start of the project. It is important that the societal impact of projects can be demonstrated.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.1.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	1.iii.	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Number of enterprises	20	400
1	1.iii.	RCO 02	Enterprises supported by grants	Number of enterprises	16	320

1	1.iii.	RCO 04	Enterprises supported with non-financial support	Number of enterprises	4	80
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Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	1.iii.	RCR 05	SMEs innovating in-house	Number of SMEs	0	2021	108	Monitoring system	Target based on assumption that 90% of number of enterprises receiving support (RCO 1) under SO 1.iii are SMEs and that 30% of them innovate in-house

2.1.2.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- SMEs - including innovative start-ups and scale-ups;
- Intermediary organisation responsible for operating the innovation scheme.

Other types of organisation as mentioned under specific objective 1.i are allowed to participate in projects under specific objective 1.iii, but only as an external contractor/knowledge provider (not as a beneficiary). This implies, they can be contracted by the beneficiaries forming the consortium as third parties. This is to ensure that the available budget under specific objective 1.iii directly benefits SMEs.

Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.1.2.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: SME competitiveness

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 1.iii, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **interrelated microeconomic developments within SMEs in the areas of competition, collaboration, innovation, product/service and online presence**. In addition to the programme area, the below mentioned regions are an integral part of the functional area under SO 1.iii. Accordingly, target groups located in these regions are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- COROP region Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant (NL);
- Leuven Arrondissement (BE);
- Düsseldorf, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Duisburg, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Koblenz, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Trier, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE).

The functional relationships at the industry level that we see in SO 1.i also apply to a large extent to the supplying and supporting SMEs. SO 1.iii is about translating these regional specialisations by SMEs on one side into new services and products, but on the other side also into new behaviour, processes and technologies implemented within these SMEs. Proximity is key when it comes to SME cooperation. The first four regions mentioned above are close to the borders (40-50 km) and about one hour drive away from the center of the programme area. The last two are located at a somewhat greater distance to the programme area borders, but can also be reached quickly from the programme area due to good infrastructural connections.

Via envisaged strategic initiatives like the “voucher project” or an innovation scheme supporting cross-border innovation cooperation, SMEs from the programme area will benefit from cooperating with SMEs from Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant, Leuven Arrondissement, the Düsseldorf/Duisburg area and the cities of Koblenz and Trier. Being part of one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the EU and part of large industrial areas in Germany, these areas represent a huge potential in terms of new markets close by for actors in the programme area.

Examples of possibilities are that Leuven based business acceleration programmes support entrepreneurs all over Flanders, including Belgian Limburg. Leuven Research & Development and Gemma Frisius Fund KU Leuven have invested in several innovative companies in Belgian Limburg, in most cases being university spin-offs. Trier is home to the Research Center for Small- and Medium Sized Enterprises, promoting exchange between players in the regional economy and the university. Such initiatives can be extended in a cross-border context, in order to create a transfer and close cooperation between SMEs and universities. Cluster Mittelrhein.Digital is a joint initiative of companies from the northern part of Rhineland-Palatinate as well as the University of Koblenz and Koblenz University of Applied Sciences for the joint development of competencies in the digitalization of business, industrial and work processes. New opportunities arise for SMEs from the programme area when they can be linked up with these types of initiatives available in the mentioned areas.

Authorities from the programme area are also cooperating in trying to support SMEs to do business abroad, such as acting together in trade missions. When involving the business community, the wider scope of the programme area can be explicitly adhered to, providing additional opportunities for SMEs in the programme area to get involved. The additional areas mentioned have powerful players who are often represented at trade missions. SMEs from the programme area can follow in their wake.

All these regions are linked with each other through the presence of a high amount of SMEs in similar industry sectors and through partially overlapping networks of all these SMEs, as a consequence of proximity. In this context, SMEs in these areas are often mutually interdependent, linked through various (historic) value chains, and faced with increasing globalisation and competitive pressure. This increasing

pressure is a key driver to encourage SMEs to strengthen cross-border partnerships in order to reduce costs and/or to facilitate the development of higher order competitive advantages.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.1.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 1.iii is aimed at strengthening the cross-border innovation and internationalisation potential of SMEs, and at reinforcing their competitiveness and growth potential on the short term. It is about stimulating actual cross-border innovation cooperation between SMEs. For this purpose, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support.

However, the possibility will be kept open to reconsider the use of financial instruments in the course of the programme, if this is considered appropriate by the Monitoring Committee. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is left open, in particular for projects involving the highest Technology Readiness Levels. If this is opted for, a programme amendment will be submitted, including a shift in the form of financing (dimension 2 in table 5).

2.1.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.iii.	010	€ 7.253.748
1	ERDF	1.iii.	013	€ 4.144.999
1	ERDF	1.iii.	026	€ 3.480.639
1	ERDF	1.iii	029	€ 2.072.500
1	ERDF	1.iii	030	€ 2.072.500

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.iii.	01	€ 19.024.386

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.iii.	33	€ 19.024.386

2.2. A greener, low carbon Meuse-Rhine area

This priority wants to achieve a greener, low-carbon Meuse-Rhine area, by promoting cross-border renewable energy solutions, climate change adaptation and the circular economy in the programme area. Actions under this priority act as an enabler in the framework of the green transformation.

☒ This is NOT a priority pursuant to a transfer under Article 17(3)

2.2.1. Specific objective: 2.ii.

2.ii. Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria set out therein

2.2.1.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

Promoting renewable energy is about climate change mitigation. Increasing the share of renewable energy sources diminishes the CO₂ emissions. Several types of action are intended under this specific objective, in order to stimulate innovative solutions for sustainable energy generation. The proposed activities are closely linked to addressing the challenges with regards to speeding up the programme area's transition into a leading green economy and society in Europe ('Industrial Transition' and 'Green Transformation'). In short, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) strongly focuses on leveraging the available knowledge and expertise in the cross-border region to roll out close-to-market renewable energy solutions.

Industrial Transition

Innovative SMEs play a pivotal role in realising green ambitions in the programme area. That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) provides support to SMEs in developing and marketing their groundbreaking products and technologies. This specific focus contributes to addressing the challenge of increasing the market uptake of innovation activities by SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups in the field of renewable energy. The Meuse-Rhine area has relatively strong regional clusters in the fields of battery technology, integrated PV, green hydrogen, carbon-free synthetic fuels, smart grids, electrification of industry and heat and storage solutions. As Industrial Transition is closely interlinked with renewable energy, also topics like robotics, artificial intelligence, data, 3D, and Internet of Things have to be taken into account. The programme's ambition is to build upon these existing strengths to combat climate change, fuel economic growth and raise living standards.

The cross-border region has a strong industrial base and excellent basic research capabilities that pave the way for the area to take the lead in these fields. The programme partners are convinced that focusing on taking full advantage of the region's technological strengths is much more effective than investing scarce resources in correcting weaknesses. Furthermore, there is lots of regional potential (see the 'Trilateral strategy for the chemical industry') to integrate energy systems on large chemical plants in the

programme area. This will allow a considerable part of the chemical industry to fasten the decoupling of fossil fuels, uptaking renewables.

Green Transformation

The overall demand and thrive for clean energy will not only mean dramatic technological change, but also greatly affects daily life in the Meuse-Rhine area. In order to gain broad acceptance for the energy transition, it is important to facilitate bottom-up local participation and public engagement. For example, local communities can play a role in the energy transition by taking on responsibilities for local energy distribution networks and owning or managing them through subsidiary services and utility companies. Institutionalising the possibility of local energy communities is a focal point of the 'Clean Energy for All Europeans' package).

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Close-to-market eco-innovation projects from SMEs concerning renewable energy. For example, developing business cases, pilot and demonstration projects in relevant environments, and translating innovations into scalable products and services;
- Innovative processes by which multiple enterprises within a shared market segment collaboratively plan, implement and manage renewable energy in a way that increases the share of renewable energy in sectors that are more difficult to decarbonise;
- Cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange on topics like hydrogen, building integrated PV, large scale (energetic and circular) renovation of buildings, green heat/cold and woodchip production, whether or not in combination with possible storage solutions and integration in the power grid or heat networks;
- Experimentation with new models for generation of renewable energy, and testing and demonstrating these renewable energy solutions in a real environment. This may lead to the identification of missing links in the cross-border network and the development of local experimentation solutions with side-by-side projects along the border, as well as on how to connect renewable energy systems across the border. SMEs and inhabitants in the Meuse-Rhine area also need support with setting up innovative organisational structures for organising and financing investments in sustainable energy generation, overcoming differences in regulations;
- Investigating possibilities for cross-border exchange of energy via a direct or an alternating current low- or medium-voltage connection between neighbouring communities, taking into account the cross-border market coupling mechanism.

SO 2.ii focuses on innovations with a Technology Readiness Level starting at 4 (development phase) and continuing through to 9 (deployment phase) at the start of the project. It is important that projects have the prospect of achieving higher TRLs and that the societal impact can be demonstrated. New renewable energy solutions cannot be considered without taking into account their grid integration and impact on the energy network. However, as SO 2.iii has not been selected by the programme, the main focus of operations should always be on the development and demonstration of renewable energy solutions.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.2.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.ii.	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Number of enterprises	2	37
2	2.ii	RCO 02	Enterprises supported by grants	Number of enterprises	2	37
2	2.ii.	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	1	15

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.ii.	RCR 02	Private investments matching public support	Amount of private investments in €	€ 0,75 million	2020	€ 1,6 million	Monitoring system	Both baseline and final target put on 50% of RCR 02 targets under 1.i.
2	2.ii.	RCR 03	SMEs introducing product of process innovation	Number of SMEs	10	2020	30	Monitoring system	Baseline put on 10% of baseline for RCR 05 under 1.i, increasing to 30% of final target for RCR 03 under 1.i for the final target, while focus is broader than only on innovation.

2.2.1.3 Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- SMEs, including innovative start-ups and scale-ups;
- Research and educational institutes;
- Regulators and e-grid infrastructure owners;
- Intermediary organisations;
- Civil society groups making the energy transition visible and tangible on a local scale. For example, citizen initiatives jointly running an energy cooperative and other forms of social organisation (e.g. foundations, NGOs, Energieagentur).

Cooperation between SMEs, knowledge and research institutes and/or citizen initiatives is a prerequisite.

Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.2.1.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: renewable energy

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 2.ii, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong innovation interdependencies in the field of renewable energy**. In addition to the programme area, the below mentioned regions are an integral part of the functional area under SO 2.ii. Accordingly, target groups located in these regions are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- COROP region Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant (NL);
- Leuven Arrondissement (BE);
- Düsseldorf, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Duisburg, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Koblenz, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Trier, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE).

Currently, many similar and sometimes parallel efforts in the field of renewable energy and energy transition are being undertaken in both the programme area as in the above mentioned regions. Especially referring to the Aachen-Köln-Mönchengladbach-Düsseldorf-Duisburg area, it can be noticed that both this area and the programme area share a background of closure of traditional coal mines with on the German side current and far-reaching plans to downsize the exploitation of brown coal mining. The experiences from this region are very particular and far-reaching ("Energiewende"), but also developments in the other mentioned regions could deliver great benefit to potential beneficiaries in the core programme area.

Furthermore, we see long lasting relationships and frequent cooperation in European projects, with involvement of partners from one or more of the above mentioned regions. This goes hand in hand with staff exchanges, like in de Solliance network (with imec, TNO, TU/e, University of Hasselt and Forschungszentrum Jülich). Rolling Solar is a recent example of an Interreg EMR 5-project with

involvement of partners from the above mentioned functional areas. KU Leuven and imec have concentrated a considerable part of their energy activities in EnergyVille in Genk. Research on some key technologies, like new generation batteries and sustainable synthetic fuels, is still being done in Leuven.

In order to make more effective use of renewable energy in chemical industry, cooperation between the programme area and the first four mentioned regions above is backed by multilateral cooperation agreements and strategies (Trilateral strategy for the chemical industry) between key players on the Flemish, NRW and South Netherlands side of the border. This serves as an example that there already exist interdependencies and that a lot of opportunities to strengthen them even further.

The cities of Koblenz and Trier are mentioned as functional areas because of their research and innovation capacities within the topic of renewable energy. Koblenz is strong in environmental sciences and the (mechanical) engineering side of renewable energy solutions. Trier is strong in environmental sciences and focuses on Intelligent Technologies for Sustainable Development (ITNE), with amongst others on its campus distinctive knowledge about energy efficient systems, energy technology, network technology/operation and environmentally compatible production processes.

All these regions are linked with each other through the presence of strong and diversified knowledge and technology clusters, universities (of applied sciences) and renewable energy communities, all contributing to a green economy and society. Based on proximity, socio-economic similarities, a historic tradition of cooperation and aligned smart specialisation strategies, various partners within this functional area are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in developing new technologies aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy.

Innovation partnerships with renewable energy actors from these regions are increasing, suggesting that an even larger innovation area is developing. Moreover, there is a great potential for energy communities in these territories to organise collective and citizen-driven energy actions across borders that will help pave the way for a clean energy transition.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.2.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 2.ii is aimed at promoting renewable energy, in order to increase the share of renewable energy sources in total energy production and consumption. The programme focuses on innovation cooperation

and experimentation in the higher Technology Readiness Levels, but always before the market introduction phase. It is generally accepted that the use of financial instruments lends itself best to the phase in which one actor demonstrably has the financially viable business case. In the earlier innovation phases of development and experimentation, in combination with the setting of complex cross-border cooperation and also referring to the types of actions described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support.

However, the possibility will be kept open to reconsider the use of financial instruments in the course of the programme, if this is considered appropriate by the Monitoring Committee. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is left open, in particular for projects involving the highest Technology Readiness Levels. If this is opted for, a programme amendment will be submitted, including a shift in the form of financing (dimension 2 in table 5).

2.2.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.ii.	029	€ 8.765.435
2	ERDF	2.ii.	046	€ 2.191.359

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.ii.	01	€ 10.956.794

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.ii.	33	€ 10.956.794

2.2.2. Specific objective: 2.iv.

2.iv. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches

2.2.2.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

Where specific objective 2.ii is focused on climate change mitigation, specific objective 2.iv focuses on climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience. The programme partners are determined to anticipate the adverse effects of climate change and to take appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage it can cause. Cities and towns across the region are increasingly being forced to mitigate the risks and consequences of events related to climate change. As a densely populated area with critical infrastructure such as transport networks, power grids, water supplies and substantial building stock, the Meuse-Rhine area already faces a wide range of natural and man-made risks and is

particularly vulnerable to additional risk of extreme weather events. Such events can have dramatic consequences for life and limb, but also for economic development and social cohesion. The programme therefore intends on seizing upon the opportunity to engage public and private stakeholders to develop and implement climate change solutions in a cross-border context, to adapt to current climate change and disaster risk challenges and to progress towards a green, climate-resilient society. For humans, adaptation aims to moderate or avoid harm, and exploit opportunities; for natural systems, humans may intervene to help adjustment.

Green Transformation

Climate change has a deeper impact on society than adapting to the immediate effects of more extreme weather phenomena, leading to more floods and droughts to be expected in the Rhine and Meuse river basin. It also has an impact on topics like nature and forests, whereas invasive species settling in the programme area due to the rise in temperature. Climate change phenomena also have a direct impact on agriculture and on public health. The specific impact on each area (urban or rural), organisation, enterprise or individual will depend on the actual changes in climate experienced, which will vary from place to place.

More cross-border cooperation and coordination is required to tackle the climate change impact. With regard to floods and drought, think about the develop of further, permanent, flood protection measures. At the same time, it is required to collect and store water better, so that in times of heat and drought more water is available for watering crops and maintaining groundwater levels. With regard to heat, cross-border cold air/fresh air corridors can be taken into account as an example. On these topics, the possibilities of adapting to climate change are manifold.

Approaches to tackle climate change can range from highly technical and resource-intensive, to simple and inexpensive. Technically complex solutions are likely to require collaboration with external experts. Companies, cities and towns can look to local universities or regional collaborations, supplemented by cross-border expertise, if needed. Community-based participatory approaches can integrate community perspectives and priorities, improving understanding of the social and locally specific consequences of climate change. Taking a combined or tiered approach can yield assessments of impacts that are grounded in community priorities and supported by sound science.

Climate adaptation efforts in the programme area offer cobenefits for climate change mitigation and for local economic development. Green building investments, for instance, provide natural cooling to occupants in times of extreme heat, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and offering benefits in terms of energy efficiency and cost savings. More broadly, adaptation investments in cities and rural areas, such as those that increase the resilience and reliability of infrastructure, can improve broader economic performance by increasing competitiveness and attractiveness for investors and the private sector in general.

Many topics under climate change adaptation also have their impact on Health and Tourism.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action (or combinations of them) are eligible for support:

- Development of joint strategies and action plans on a cross-border scale stimulating organisations such as governments, enterprises, knowledge institutes, NGOs and local communities to implement

for example flood protection measures, storm and drought protection measures, heat action plans and better water management and water resource conservation.

- Market-oriented cooperation and knowledge exchange between SMEs and knowledge institutes regarding climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, in which public and private R&D capacity is linked. This involves facilitating cross-border networks in tackling local and specific climate adaptation and disaster resilience challenges which are widely applicable.
- Living labs and demonstration projects in the real environment, in which companies, knowledge institutes and end users work together on innovations that contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster resilience (e.g. flood protection and water retention measures, resilience of critical infrastructure);
- Empowering energy communities / positive energy districts on a cross-border scale to adapt to climate change. This involves more low-cost solutions to anticipate and mitigate climate change impacts. These can complement existing adaptation efforts, and better engage local communities in private climate change preventions actions, protecting their environments. For example, promoting the installation of green roofs to limit surface water runoff and reducing temperature in the built environment. Or a community-led plantation of trees in public areas;
- Cross-border information sessions, counselling and advanced training, to raise awareness and provide specific insights in the consequences of climate change phenomena, cascading effects and compound disaster risk (e.g. for the agricultural or the health sector), and support public risk awareness and preparedness.

SO 2.iv focuses on innovations with a Technology Readiness Level starting at 4 (development phase) and continuing through to 9 (deployment phase) at the start of the project. It is important that projects have the prospect of achieving higher TRLs and that the social impact can be demonstrated.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.2.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.iv.	RCO 83 – INT	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Number of strategies and actions plans developed	1	12
2	2.iv	RCO 84 – INT	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	2	36
2	2.iv	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	2	48
2	2.iv	RCO 115	Public events across borders jointly organised	Number of events	0	6

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Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.iv.	RCR 79 – INT	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Number of strategies and actions plan taken up	0	2021	9	Monitoring system	Assumption that 75% of strategies and action plans developed (RCO 83 – INT) are actually being taken up by organisations.

2.2.2.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Governmental organisations (national, regional or local authorities);
- Enterprises;
- Research and educational institutes;
- Intermediary organisations;
- NGOs;
- Local communities / inhabitant groups.

Involvement of national, regional or local authorities, enterprises and knowledge institutes is a prerequisite. Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.2.2.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: climate change adaptation and mitigation

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 2.iv, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong linkages in addressing climate change**. In addition to the programme area, the below mentioned regions are an integral part of the functional area under SO 2.iv. Accordingly, target groups located in these regions are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- COROP region Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant (NL);
- Leuven Arrondissement (BE);
- Düsseldorf, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);

- Duisburg, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Koblenz, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Trier, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE).

On the one hand, these additional areas have similar geomorphological characteristics as (parts of) the programme area. These may include soil type or soil structure, land usage, the catchment area of streams and rivers running through the area, landscape features, building patterns, or problems of flooding, warming, desiccation and water retention. On the other hand, the above mentioned areas are home to knowledge institutes that can contribute to dealing with climate change in the programme area.

This means that climate change challenges and the need to come up with adaptive solutions are to a large extent comparable. As a densely populated area with critical infrastructure such as transport networks, power grids, water supplies and substantial building stock, this functional area is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, as the recent floodings during summer of 2021 have dramatically highlighted. Due to prolonged rainfall, streams and rivers overflowed their banks in a large part of the programme area, resulting in enormous personal suffering and material damage.

Cities like Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Trier and Koblenz, directly located along rivers, can deliver a valuable contribution in terms of flood protection experience. They have a climate adaptation concept and could thus, broaden the spectrum on the topic. With their scientific universities, their involvement could benefit cooperation. As large cities with many economic links to the programme area and correspondingly established entrepreneurial know-how, their involvement would also be enriching with regard to the development of a climate adaptation economy.

Düsseldorf's climate adaptation concept (KAKDUS) was prepared in 2016/2017 to be able to address the consequences of climate change such as precipitation shifts, heavy rain, dryness, floods. Concrete measures have already been implemented, such as the development of a flood protection concept and the improvement of flood prevention. But also giving support for roof greening and insulation measures. Key measures for the implementation of the concept are thematically clustered and involve analytical measures (heavy rain hazard map), structural and ecological measures (concept for dealing with heavy rainfall events, action plan for shading and cooling heavily frequented public spaces), organisational and communication measures. Duisburg has also developed a climate change concept. It can also share experience with measures addressed at protecting infrastructure (such as ports).

Thus, all the functional cooperation areas mentioned have strong and diversified knowledge and technology clusters, with universities (of applied sciences) being able to come up with new solutions for climate change problems, but also to make the connection with the regional economy (SMEs) and society and the challenges of the green economy. Based on this proximity and common challenges (e.g. flood protection, storm and drought protection, water management), various partners within this functional area are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in developing new cross-border strategies with cost-efficient climate change adaptation measures. By promoting jointly developed strategies and action plans, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) accelerates the transformation to a climate-resilient future.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.2.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 2.iv focuses on climate change adaptation, anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage it can cause. Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support.

However, the possibility will be kept open to reconsider the use of financial instruments in the course of the programme, if this is considered appropriate by the Monitoring Committee. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is left open, in particular for projects involving the highest Technology Readiness Levels. If this is opted for, a programme amendment will be submitted, including a shift in the form of financing (dimension 2 in table 5).

2.2.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.iv.	058	€ 5.123.546
2	ERDF	2.iv.	060	€ 5.123.546
2	ERDF	2.iv.	064	€ 2.561.773

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.iv.	01	€ 12.808.865

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.iv.	33	€ 12.808.865

2.2.3. Specific objective: 2.vi.

2.vi. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

2.2.3.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The programme partners are willing to take measures to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. This is essential, as partner regions from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands have to speed up their efforts to achieve their climate goals. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has showcased the dependency of Europe's industry on non-EU countries for raw materials and electronic components. Hence, transitioning towards a circular economy could bring net benefits to the programme area in terms of reduced material inputs and associated labour and energy costs, as well as reduced carbon emissions along entire supply chains. This includes the implementation of 'biobased' value chains, where raw materials are replaced by sustainable biobased raw materials. As Industrial Transition is closely interlinked with circular economy, innovation topics like robotics, artificial intelligence, data, 3D printing, and Internet of Things play an important role in feedstock transition and thus have to be taken into account in progressing towards a circular economy. The combination of applying advanced technologies and innovative businesses must pave the way to a greener economy.

Green Transformation

The programme area holds considerable potential for cross-border eco-innovation and demonstration projects focusing on new circular products, circular processes and circular business models. One can think of projects focused on re-using (natural) resources, closing resource and material cycles (e.g. in agriculture and construction), (urban) agriculture, introducing or upscaling circular or biobased economy solutions (e.g. the Aachen-Maastricht Institute for Biobased Materials), increasing circularity in all sectors. As the circular economy is based on re-using natural resources and thus creating new added value for resources, it opens up new avenues for businesses, and alternatives for products and services that have a higher ecological footprint. SMEs, startups and scale-ups are realizing the potential of these opportunities and are coming forward with new business models to suit the requirements of the future market trends. These social and green entrepreneurs in the programme area are considered as the drivers accelerating the transition to a circular economy and society. Focus is on increasing and accelerating the market uptake of innovation activities related to circular economy in a cross-border context.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Development of new circular products, circular processes and circular business models;
- Close-to-market eco-innovation projects, technology transfer and cooperation between companies aimed at transitioning towards a circular economy. Consider, for example, cooperation and knowledge exchange on topics like re-using resources, material cycles, feedstock transition, large scale (energetic and circular) renovation of buildings, and circular and smart buildings;
- Living labs and demonstration projects in the real environment, in which companies, knowledge institutes and end users work together on innovations that contribute to the circular economy;

- Community-based responses and associated physical infrastructure, such as makerspaces, fab labs and community technology workshops to complement the industrial-scale response regarding circular principles. This includes promoting reducing resource consumption through sharing, fix-it clinics and repair cafes, digital fabrication techniques, open source machines converting waste into filaments for reuse, and convening events and activities to challenge designers and suppliers into thinking creatively about how their waste resources could be used in projects by others;
- Creating partnerships for industrial symbiosis across borders on a (eu)regional scale, aimed at developing concrete projects that go beyond symbiosis; for example: new business models, functional economy, responsible consumption, sustainable procurement, circular design, and reverse logistics.

SO 2.vi focuses on innovations with a Technology Readiness Level starting at 4 (development phase) and continuing through to 9 (deployment phase) at the start of the project. It is important that projects have the prospect of achieving higher TRLs and that the societal impact can be demonstrated.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.2.3.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.vi.	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Number of enterprises	2	37
2	2.vi	RCO 02	Enterprises supported by grants	Number of enterprises	2	37
2	2.vi.	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	1	16

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.vi.	RCR 02	Private investments matching public support	Amount of private investments in €	€ 0,375 million	2020	€ 0,8 million	Monitoring system	Both baseline and final target put on 25% of targets for RCR 02 under 1.i.
2	2.vi.	RCR 03	SMEs introducing product of	Number of SMEs	10	2020	30	Monitoring system	Put on 10% of baseline for RCR 05

			process innovation						under 1.i, increasing to 30% for final target.
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2.2.3.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- SMEs, including innovative start-ups and scale-ups;
- Research and educational institutes;
- Makerspaces and fab and living labs;
- Civil society groups making the energy transition visible and tangible on a local scale. For example, citizen initiatives jointly running an energy cooperative and other forms of social organisation (e.g. foundations, NGOs).

Cooperation between SMEs, knowledge and research institutes and/or citizen initiatives is a prerequisite. Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.2.3.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: circular economy

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 2.vi (SO 2.vi), Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong innovation interdependencies regarding the circular economy**. In addition to the programme area, the below mentioned regions are an integral part of the functional area under SO 2.ii. Accordingly, target groups located in these regions are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- COROP region Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant (NL);
- Leuven Arrondissement (BE);
- Düsseldorf, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Duisburg, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Koblenz, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE);
- Trier, Kreisfreie Stadt (DE).

All these regions are linked with each other through the presence of strong and diversified knowledge and technology clusters, universities (of applied sciences) and communities, all contributing to a circular economy. Based on proximity, socio-economic similarities, a historic tradition of cooperation and aligned smart specialisation strategies, various organisations within this functional area are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in developing new technologies aimed at accelerating the transition to a circular economy. Innovation partnerships with circular economy actors from these regions are increasing, suggesting that an even larger innovation area is developing.

Currently, many similar and sometimes parallel efforts in the field of circular economy are undertaken in both the programme area as in the above mentioned regions. There are strong engineering and

technology linkages between the different regions and the programme areas. Take for example the EIT Raw Materials initiative, which is run from Leuven, but which contains many partners from the programme area that cooperate. The heart of the European Enhanced Landfill Mining Consortium (Eurelco) is equally euregional, with KU Leuven, University of Hasselt, University of Liège and RWTH Aachen as partners. Linked to NRW's plans to downsize the exploitation of brown coal mining, far-reaching investments and developments are planned ("Energiewende"), with special attention to circularity. These developments, but also in the other mentioned regions, could deliver great benefit to potential beneficiaries in the core programme area.

In the field of bio-economy cooperation between the programme area and the first four mentioned regions above is backed by multilateral cooperation agreements and strategies (Trilateral Bio-economy Strategy) between key players on the Flemish, NRW and South Netherlands side of the border.

With regard to Duisburg, it is mentioned that the inland ports of Genk and Liège on the one side and the Duisburg inland port on the other side form together an unequalled port area in the heart of Europe. Each individually are leading actions on decarbonization of economic activities and circular economy practices. But in the absence of a joint vision on the area and strong(er) incentives for cooperation between the mentioned port areas the potential of the whole area remains now underexploited. Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) can (modestly) contribute in amending this gap by providing a joint canvas or platform for cooperation between them.

The cities of Koblenz and Trier are mentioned as functional areas because of their research and innovation capacities within the topic of circular economy. Koblenz is strong in environmental sciences and the (mechanical) engineering and process technology side of circular economy solutions. Trier is strong in environmental sciences and focuses on Intelligent Technologies for Sustainable Development (ITNE), with amongst others on its campus distinctive knowledge about environmentally compatible production processes, bio-, environmental and process engineering, focusing on effective use and saving of raw materials and energy in production processes.

Thus, all these regions are functionally linked with each other through the presence of strong and diversified knowledge and technology clusters and universities (of applied sciences). Based on proximity, socio-economic similarities, a historic tradition of cooperation and aligned smart specialisation strategies, various partners within this functional area are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in developing new technologies aimed at the transition to a more circular economy.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.2.3.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one

identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 2.vi focuses on supporting innovations and demonstrations to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. The programme focuses on innovation cooperation and demonstration in the higher Technology Readiness Levels, but always before the market introduction phase. It is generally accepted that the use of financial instruments lends itself best to the phase in which one actor demonstrably has the financially viable business case. In the earlier innovation phases of development and demonstration, in combination with the setting of complex cross-border cooperation and also referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support.

However, the possibility will be kept open to reconsider the use of financial instruments in the course of the programme, if this is considered appropriate by the Monitoring Committee. Support for actions under this priority is provided mainly in the form of grants to beneficiaries. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is left open, in particular for projects involving higher Technology Readiness Levels. This will be weighed up on a call-by-call basis during implementation. If this is opted for, a programme amendment will be submitted, including a shift in the form of financing (dimension 2 in table 5).

2.2.3.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.vi.	030	€ 9.475.227
2	ERDF	2.vi.	075	€ 4.060.812

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.vi.	01	€ 13.536.039

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.vi.	33	€ 13.536.039

2.3. A more social Meuse-Rhine area

This priority involves improving social development across borders. Promotion of this theme takes place within the outlined societal challenges of Industrial Transition, Towards a Green Society, Healthier inhabitants and Live and Work without Borders.

☒ This is NOT a priority pursuant to a transfer under Article 17(3)

2.3.1. Specific objective: 4.i.

4.i. Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy

2.3.1.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The programme partners aim to enhance the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment across borders. Strengthening on-the-job training is an important condition for a better functioning labour market across borders. This applies to all knowledge levels and all forms of work, manual and intellectual. As a result of demographic, industrial and climate-related developments, new specific staffing needs will arise in many sectors in the coming decade (including technical professions and in healthcare). For the sectors with the biggest employment challenges, this requires a 360 degree labour market approach, with targeted efforts and interventions in the programme area to overcome obstacles threatening the well-functioning labour market in the border region.

That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is concentrated on the one hand to attract talent and on the other hand to boosting the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce to take on different or entirely new roles. Transitioning towards Industry 4.0, the uptake of key enabling technologies, and growing investments in the energy transition will go hand-in-hand with promoting specific skills training and new approaches to workplace learning in these fields. This also involves specific labour market challenges in the health sector and overcoming differences in national labour systems. In short, these combined efforts are key in addressing the societal challenges *Industrial Transition*, *Green Transformation*, *Healthier inhabitants* and *Live and Work without Borders*.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Multi-level partnerships to analyse and tackle specific barriers identified in relation to cross-border employability such as recognition of skills, qualifications, social security, pensions, taxations, transport, schools etc.;
- Mapping of existing labour shortages and specific professions in the different parts of the programme area, as there may be a direct added value in encouraging cross-border mobility;
- Coordination efforts to attract new talent (both quantity and appropriate quality) and to support methods for upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce and to propose new professional opportunities with regards to Industry 4.0, 'green' skills, and environmental awareness;
- Developing and maintaining existing information provision services about the conditions for cross-border employment. This also includes labour market mediation, teaching of resume skills, digitalisation of labour market services, and deepening the network and collaboration between the different stakeholders providing similar labour market services.

This priority focuses on achieving active cooperation between training institutes, employers and employees across borders. It is important that projects have the prospect of improving the access to employment and developing new skills.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.3.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	4.i.	RCO 83 – INT	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Number of strategies and actions plans developed	0	7
3	4.i	RCO 84 – INT	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	1	21
3	4.i.	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	2	40

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	4.i.	RCR 79 – INT	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Number of strategies and actions plan taken up	0	2021	5	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 75% of the developed action plans will be carried out in practise, during Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

2.3.1.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Employers, employees and job seekers;

- Regional and local authorities, as well as economic and social partners (e.g. employers' and workers' associations);
- Professional associations and health insurers;
- Entrepreneurs (in particular SMEs);
- Hospitals, universities (of applied sciences), vocational and professional bachelor education institutes, schools, training institutes and health organizations.

Cooperation between educational institutes, employers and/or employees/job seekers across borders is a prerequisite under this specific objective. Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.3.1.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: labour market and quality employment

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 4.i (SO 4.i), Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong interdependencies regarding the labour market**. In addition to the programme area, the two below mentioned areas are an integral part of the functional area under SO 4.i. Accordingly, target groups located in these areas are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Arrondissements Huy and Waremme (BE)

Both arrondissements are part of Province of Liège and are thus closely connected to the rest of the province (part of the programme area), being explicitly part of the provincial employment basin. The whole employment basis would greatly benefit from the possibilities offered by the Interreg-programme, like the development of green skills, fighting labour shortages, recognition of skills and above all worker mobility. The Province of Liège is particularly rich in terms of the social economy, the energy sector, the social housing sector, the cultural sector and societal and welfare services. The Province of Liège, including Huy-Waremme, has an extended network of social economy integration enterprises, with 59 enterprises throughout the province being recognised as social economy initiatives by the Walloon Public Service (SPW). A promotional campaign was launched in Liège on 4 May 2021 to raise awareness and inform young people about social and cooperative entrepreneurship. The experiment will be repeated from 2022 to 2024, particularly in the Huy-Waremme basin. In short, both the arrondissements of Huy and Waremme are interconnected with provincial policy initiatives and thus, like the other NUTS-III regions of Province of Liège, possess good opportunities to participate in labour market and quality employment projects based on the functional area principle.

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to enhance the effectiveness of the labour market and access to quality employment throughout the programme area, including the areas additionally participating based on the functional area principle. There is no further demarcation within it, or demarcation in the form of specific territories. Nor does it make use of territorial or area-based tools. However, there is room in projects to enhance the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment on a local scale and/or in an area-focused manner.

2.3.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 4.i is aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and facilitating access to quality employment across borders. Referring to types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen.

2.3.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.i.	134	€ 2.912.203
3	ERDF	4.i.	140	€ 2.912.203
3	ERDF	4.i.	141	€ 2.912.203

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.i.	01	€ 8.736.609

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.i.	33	€ 8.736.609

2.3.2. Specific objective: 4.ii.

4.ii. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

2.3.2.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

Programme partners have stressed the importance of improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders with a view to increasing the educational attainment and skills levels thereof as to be recognised across borders. This applies to all knowledge levels and all forms

of education. With the presence of 8 universities, 29 universities of applied sciences, and 265.000 students, the programme area's educational infrastructure is well positioned to increase skills levels in order to meet future demands of the cross-border labour market, including the influx of young workers into the labour force.

That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE)'s activities focus on moving towards new forms of education and lifelong learning, combining them where possible. Moving towards Industry 4.0 and Healthier inhabitants, the uptake of key enabling technologies, and growing investments in the energy transition will go hand-in-hand with promoting revisions of student curriculums, interdisciplinarity in teaching and more intensive education-industry collaborations across borders. There are specific challenges regarding the quality of education, training and lifelong learning concerning the health sector. Moreover, cross-border study programmes, diplomas and strategic actions focusing on mutual language learning will further improve the access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders. These combined efforts are essential in addressing the societal challenges *Industrial Transition*, *Green Transformation*, *Healthier inhabitants* and *Live and Work without Borders*.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Improving access to education, training and promoting lifelong learning approaches (e.g. Learning Communities in collaboration with businesses);
- Coordination efforts to support synergies between universities and vocational bodies to increase the attractiveness of tertiary education curricula and to propose new professional opportunities regarding the identified five grand societal challenges;
- Joint strategies to facilitate student exchanges, acknowledgement, degrees and certificates including for vocational training;
- Mutual language learning efforts for workers, students and pupils;
- Joint education schemes and development of digitised tools and learning methods. This includes creating exchange between stakeholders such as schools, business, and local administrations to further develop schemes to promote studies, traineeships, apprentices, internships and school programmes across borders;
- Post COVID-19 transitions in health education.

This priority focuses on achieving active cooperation between educational institutes, employers and employees across borders, thus contributing to the Commission's vision of the European Education Area by 2025. It is important that projects have the prospect of improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders. The development of actions should as far as possible be synergetic with and complementary to the Erasmus+ programme, in particular the "Education, Training and Youth" and "Alliances for innovation" fields. Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning at cross-border level, or on aspects that are not covered by Erasmus+.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.3.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	4.ii.	RCO 83 – INT	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Number of strategies and actions plans developed	0	6
3	4.ii.	RCO 84 – INT	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	1	18
3	4.ii.	RCO 85 - INT	Participations in joint training schemes	Number of participations	38	750
3	4.ii.	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	2	35

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	4.ii.	RCR 79 – INT	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Number of strategies and actions plan taken up	0	2021	5	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 80% of the development action plans will be carried out in practise, during Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).
3	4.ii.	RCR 81 – INT	Completion of joint training schemes	Number of participants	0	2021	600	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 80% of the participants in joint training schemes complete the training successfully. Therefore 80% of RCO 85.

2.3.2.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Universities (of applied sciences), vocational and professional bachelor education institutes, schools, training institutes and health organisations;
- Entrepreneurs (in particular SMEs);
- Students, interns, trainees, apprentices and pupils;
- Regional and local authorities, as well as economic and social partners (e.g. employers' and workers' associations);
- Professional associations and health insurers.

Cooperation between educational institutes, students and/or employers across borders is a prerequisite under this specific objective. Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.3.2.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: education, training and life long learning

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 4.ii (SO 4.ii), Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong interdependencies regarding education, training and life long learning**. In addition to the programme area, the two below mentioned areas are an integral part of the functional area under SO 4.ii. Accordingly, target groups located in these areas are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Arrondissements Huy and Waremme (BE)

Both arrondissements are part of Province of Liège and are thus closely connected to the rest of the province (part of the programme area), being explicitly part of the provincial employment basin. The whole employment basis would greatly benefit from the possibilities offered by the Interreg programme, with regard to education, training and life long learning. Provincial training centers are also represented in Huy-Waremme, offering educational organisations like the Provincial Training Center for Agriculture and Rurality to participate in projects again (like in EMR Wine during Interreg V). The specialisation of certain training centres such as the Epicuris competence centre, the CTA environment, La Paix Dieu (training centre specialising in heritage), constitute centres of expertise which will undoubtedly interest partners across the border. In short, both the arrondissements of Huy and Waremme are interconnected with provincial policy initiatives and thus, like the other NUTS-III regions of Province of Liège, possess good opportunities to participate in education, training and life long learning projects based on the functional area principle.

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to improve access to and quality of education, training and lifelong learning throughout the programme area, including the areas additionally participating based on the functional area principle. There is no further demarcation within it, or demarcation in the form of specific territories. Nor does it make use of territorial or area-based tools. However, there is room in projects to improve access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning on a local scale and/or in an area-focused manner.

2.3.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 4.ii is aimed at improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders with a view to increasing the educational attainment and skills levels thereof as to be recognised across borders. Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen.

2.3.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.ii.	146	€ 3.868.181
3	ERDF	4.ii.	150	€ 3.868.180

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.ii.	01	€ 7.736.361

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.ii.	33	€ 7.736.361

2.3.3 Specific objective: 4.v.

4.v. Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care

2.3.3.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The programme partners aim to enhance the cross-border cooperation in the area of health care and health services, in order to promote the equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable health care (services). We do not have to focus only on innovation, but also on the practical trainings on

innovation and the implementation. There is a long lasting cooperation on emergency care in the Meuse-Rhine area (since the late 1990s). The emergency cooperation in the programme area includes 57 hospitals (including 3 academic hospitals), 70 rescue services and 9 dispatch centres. In such a densely populated area, economies of scale through the pooling of resources or via an integrated specialisation system for health care centres could bring many advantages to both patients and social security systems. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the health system comes under enormous pressure due to a large influx of patients.

Healthier inhabitants

Previous joint initiatives across borders have demonstrated the potential for rapid improvement of care services and exploring new ways to prevent or cure diseases. The project OncoCare, for instance, aims to improve the oncological care in the Meuse-Rhine area involving four hospitals, three universities and a private company. Another example is the joint Centre for Paediatric Surgery which provides specialised care to the patients (pooling expertise). However, this centre still faces some challenges such as the recognition of this centre within the various national systems, the mutual recognition of qualifications and data registration (different IT systems and privacy laws). These systemic differences still constitute obstacles – not just for pediatric surgery – for further deepening cooperation in cross-border healthcare.

Moreover, there is a high need for developing better diagnostics, more effective therapies and new models and technologies promoting healthy ageing and a healthy lifestyle. In addition, the exchange of medical equipment and information across borders is still hampered by systemic differences between countries. This issue, for instance, has once again come to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, more cross-border cooperation and planning is required to achieve a more efficient health system in the programme area for the benefit of healthier inhabitants. New models of care will support transition away from hospital-centred models to more person-centred approaches, which may also increase the need for deinstitutionalisation in case of delivering long-term care⁴. Another challenge lies in the development and roll-out of teleconsultation in healthcare and home automation. In particular, the medical-social side of this, such as empathy, understanding and acceptance of the message, requires attention.

Also part of this specific objective is to ensure access to health care for persons with an impairment and the aspect of mental health and psycho-social work, which must not be disregarded in a holistic approach.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Exploring new ways to prevent diseases (from universal, to selective, to indicated prevention) and support for people at risk for / with chronic diseases, tackling the social and environmental causes that are related to specific health problems of the programme area;

⁴ Investments on this matter have to be in line with the principles of deinstitutionalisation and desegregation and the requirements of the UNCRPD, including General Comment No. 5 and UNCRPD committee concluding observations, with due respect for the principles of equality, freedom of choice, the right to independent living, accessibility and prohibiting all forms of segregation. The investments have to demonstrate compliance with and contribute to the relevant deinstitutionalisation strategies and relevant EU policy and legal frameworks for upholding human rights obligations, namely the UNCRPD and General Comment No. 5, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

- Developing better diagnostics and more effective therapies related to specific health problems of the programme area;
- Exploring new models of care (including domotica and teleconsultation) promoting healthy ageing and healthy lifestyle;
- Cross-border planning of health care staff and equipment;
- Combatting mental health care issues and mutual learning on good practices;
- Promoting collaboration between and better connection of health care organisations in the programme area (e.g. pediatric surgery, rare diseases);
- Implementation and dissemination of health care technology and innovations (solving objectively identifiable shortcomings in the area of technology and equipment, or stimulating innovations that promote cross-border synergy and cooperation as much as possible);
- Train current practitioners about digital skills and different ways of health care giving using the innovations that are available;
- Developing cooperation agreements to ease the work of health workers (e.g. allow ambulance crews to cross the border in urgent cases).

This specific objective focuses on achieving active cooperation between health care organisations across borders. It is important that projects have the prospect of improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning across borders.

Projects aimed at enhancing access to health care services across borders belong under SO 4.v, in order to ensure that these projects end up under this SO in the implementation practice. It must be prevented that projects aimed at this topic end up elsewhere, even if there is a connection with SO 4.i and SO 4.ii in terms of content.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.3.3.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	4.v	RCO 84 – INT	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Number of pilot actions	0	8
3	4.v.	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	1	18

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	4.v.	RCR 72	Annual users of new or modernised e-health care services	Number of users	0	2021	500	Monitoring system	RCR72 is to be understood as the annual number of registered unique users of e-health care services newly created or modernised. The achieved number of users has to be calculated over a period of one year after the completion of the intervention. When 4 health care projects are expected, 2 are expected to deal with this topic. A cautious estimate is that 250 users per project (total 500 users) can be reached over a period of one year after completion of the intervention. The baseline has been set at 0, as it refers to the year before the intervention starts. Assuming

									new e-health services are developed, the baseline value is 0.
3	4.v.	RCR 84 - INT	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number of organisations	0	2021	13	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 70% of the organisations that have participated will remain cooperating across border after project completion.

2.3.3.3. Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Universities (of applied sciences), vocational and professional bachelor education institutes, schools, training institutes and health organisations;
- Hospitals, rescue services, dispatch centres, health insurers, informal care and social work;
- Entrepreneurs (in particular Health SMEs);
- Regional and local authorities, as well as patient organisations (not-for profit).

Cooperation between health organisations across borders is a prerequisite under this specific objective. Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.3.3.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to facilitate innovations throughout the programme area. There is no further demarcation within it, or demarcation in the form of specific territories. Nor does it make use of territorial or area-based tools. However, there is room in projects to enhance the equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable healthcare services on a local scale and/or in an area-focused manner.

2.3.3.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 4.v is aimed at enhancing the cross-border cooperation in the area of health care and health services, in order to promote the equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable health care (services). Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen.

2.3.3.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.v.	129	€ 800.513
3	ERDF	4.v.	158	€ 3.602.308
3	ERDF	4.v.	160	€ 3.602.308

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.v.	01	€ 8.005.129

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.v.	33	€ 8.005.129

2.3.4. Specific objective: 4.vi.

4.vi. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

2.3.4.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The programme partners focus specific objective 4.vi entirely on the grand societal challenge of 'Tourism in a high quality region'. The intention is to support the tourism sector to recover from the COVID 19-crisis and to develop further. To assess the need for joint coordinated actions, two stakeholder sessions with relevant tourism actors from different regions have been organised. These sessions pointed out broad support for coordinated actions on tourism.

Tourism in a high quality region

The expert sessions made clear that the tourism sector in the programme area faces several challenges:

- Digitalisation;
- Enhancement and creation of innovative touristic products;
- Increasing the competence to increase competitiveness and resilience;
- Green Deal;
- Sustainability in its broad sense (environmental, social and financial).

By focusing on these topics Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) wants to contribute to keep visitors in the region for longer, increasing the number of overnight stays and also to establish higher leisure expenditures.

To achieve this, it is necessary to give a qualitative impulse to the regional tourist-recreational offer, through developing new products and services and digitalisation of the offer. Coordinated actions to generate a qualitative impulse to the tourist-recreational offer, based on uniform quality standards, are important in order to raise the competitiveness of the tourism sector. This is particularly the case for SMEs, as they have often not been able yet to recognise the added value of digitalisation, or they lack the skills in dealing with new technologies.

Then, we automatically touch upon the point of the sector's competence to innovate, which is another important factor in raising the competitiveness of the sector. SMEs are often not in a position to take action themselves, which is where the programme comes in and can provide concrete tools to strengthen the innovation skills of the sector's actors. Competence also involves the professionalisation of the reception of tourists and the management of tourist infrastructures. We want to support the sector in awareness-raising and training in the use of digital tools and new concepts, combining physical location and online sales.

Besides investing in the quality of the offer, attention should also be paid to the transition to green and sustainable tourism. This is about enhancing tourism in relation to environmental and climate protection, and the circular economy, as well as and promoting sustainable development and eco-innovation.

These challenges also form the guideline on how to practically strengthen the tourism sector in the programme area. The topics make together the practical guide to work towards a qualitative impulse for the sector, around common storylines like outdoor experience, culinary, GREEN tourism⁵, cultural heritage, trails and cycling routes.

What is needed are multi-thematic and coordinated actions, bringing together facets such as entrepreneurship, competence, sustainable tourism, green destinations, circularity, biodiversity, a serving (green) infrastructure, mobility, cultural heritage, inclusion ('tourism for all'), soft skills and language. In developing these actions, attention should also be paid to possible negative impacts of stimulating tourism (Overtourism) and also to the effects of other main transitions in the economy. In this way, coordinated actions are facilitated with which the programme area can distinguish itself as a strong tourist region in Europe.

Branding the Meuse-Rhine area as one touristic destination is not seen as a favorable or realistic approach. However, joint marketing of top touristic offers can help the sector to recover from the current COVID-19 crisis and provide the necessary traffic in terms of visitors.

At last, applications should be developed to better manage touristic backoffice topics in the future, like management of tourist flows and big data exchange and analysis. This can go hand in hand with the establishment of a long-term tool for market research. Here, however, it is important to agree on a

⁵ Genuine and Authentic, Responsible, Economically sustainable, Environmentally sustainable, Nature and scenery

common methodology across borders, to align the available statistics and to compare markets over several years as well as to update the data.

Eventually, the ambition is that these actions contribute to a more holistic focus on tourism for the programme area, intensifying the cooperation of tourism stakeholders. While the programme partners have indicated that a single holistic tourism strategy is not considered appropriate yet, joint strategic approaches in specific sub-fields of tourism, like digitalisation, are of clear added value. The association of several partner regions, working in 'community development', thus starts as a gradual process that will have to be given time to grow.

The cultural sector can also play a role in meeting the grand social challenge of Tourism in a High Quality region, but there must always be a clear connection to and focus on tourism.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of action are eligible for support:

- Development of common tourism projects, contributing to common storylines and a strategic approach, establishing increased coordination between projects, within a context of uniform quality standards;
- Creation of integrated offers on cross-border territory level, where the tourism sector and other sectors like the cultural and heritage sector work more closely together;
- Development of innovative solutions, awareness and direct support tools and new business models in tourism, in order to raise competitiveness of SMEs;
- Reinforcing the digital capacities of tourism enterprises, by providing low-threshold support;
- Developing and using digital technologies to enhance the tourist experience and to develop quality approaches for service excellence;
- Actions to reinforce the resilience of the tourism sector through training, capacity building (both to organisations and employees), professionalisation and promotion of multilingualism;
- Promotion of sustainability in the tourism sector, by enhancing tourism in relation to nature, promotion of eco-innovation, sustainable development, and the transition to a circular economy and circular business models; sustainability is meant here in its broad definition, covering the environmental, social and financial strands);
- Awareness raising and promotion of short circuits for regional tourism products;
- Diversification of tourism by investing in both known and lesser-known, smaller scale destinations and diverse forms of tourism (cultural, rural, agro-tourism, sport, health/medical tourism); consequently contributing to the livelihoods of local and regional communities;
- Implementation of sustainable mobility solutions and infrastructures, like sustainable cross-border tourist trails and cycling routes, improving touristic and leisure quality of the programme area, benefitting from the sustainable effects that focusing on smaller scale and nearby destinations have;
- Development of euregional support structures in the background, for example for the common use of digital tools, big data collection and analysis, long-term market research, guest management and mutual knowledge exchange on these topics;
- Programme area broad marketing of top touristic offers/products, focusing on specific themes, like culinary, architecture, culture, based on a commonly developed social media campaign concept.

Actions need to ensure measures achieving social inclusion and social innovation in the sector. This has to ensure a positive impact on local communities and to demonstrate how the aim of strengthening the

local economy is materialised. The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.3.4.2 Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	4.vi.	RCO 01	Enterprises supported	Number of enterprises	1	25
3	4.vi.	RCO 02	Enterprises supported by grants	Number of enterprises	1	20
3	4.vi.	RCO 04	Enterprises supported with non-financial support	Number of enterprises	0	5
3	4.vi.	RCO 77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Number of sites	0	9
3	4.vi.	RCO 87 - INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	2	36

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	4.vi.	RCR 77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	Number of visitors	0	2021	22.500	Monitoring system	RCR 77 is to be understood as the estimated number of annual visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported. The estimation should be carried out ex post one year after the completion of the intervention. For

									calculating the final target value, it is assumed that the 9 supported sites receive on average 2.500 visitors per year. This figure is highly dependent on the type of site supported. The baseline has been set at 0, as it refers to the year before the intervention starts, assuming only new tourism and cultural sites are developed.
3	4.vi.	RCR 84 - INT	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number of organisations	0	2021	25	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 70% of the organisations that have participated will remain cooperating across border after project completion. So, $0,7 * RCO_{87}$ final target = 25.

2.3.4.3 Main target groups

The following main target groups are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- SMEs and social enterprises (in particular entrepreneurs in the tourism sector);
- Public and private organisations responsible for or involved in tourism policy, like provinces, municipalities, national agencies, regional tourism and culture promotion and development organisations, civil society organisations (foundations, NGOs) in the tourism, culture and nature sector;

- Knowledge and educational institutes specialised in leisure economics and consumer behaviour;
- Natural parcs;
- Environmental associations;
- Cultural and creative industry.

Further requirements are formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.3.4.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Functional area: Tourism in a High Quality Region

In order to grasp the full potential of the cross-border region's strengths with regard to specific objective 4.vi, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on a functional area characterised by **strong linkages** in addressing the grand societal challenge of **Tourism in a High Quality Region**. In addition to the programme area, the integration of a specific objective on tourism is seen as an opportunity to integrate the below mentioned regions as functional areas within SO 4.vi. Accordingly, target groups located in these areas are also potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- Arrondissements Huy and Waremme (BE);
- Kreisfreie Städte Düsseldorf and Duisburg (DE).
- Arrondissements Huy and Waremme (BE)

The Meuse-Condruz-Hesbaye Tourist Office, whose marketing name is "Terres-de-Meuse", is the result of the merger of three Tourist Offices (Pays de Huy-Meuse-Condruz, Hesbaye-Meuse and the Burdinale and Meuhaigne valleys). It is the tourist association for 27 municipalities, aimed at welcoming tourists and coordinating and promoting tourism in the area. The territory is rich in its built and natural heritage, but also in the many tourist sites and attractions that are constantly being developed to expand the offer. Amongst the built heritage, we mention the castles of different styles and periods: the castle of Modave, the castle of Jehay or the feudal castle of Moha, open to the public constantly or from time to time for activities and events.

Nature is omnipresent in Terres-de-Meuse. The network of walks is constantly evolving to offer a wide choice of routes for walkers, mountain bikers and horse riders. The network of nodes has also recently been introduced. There is also a nature park and many protected or themed sites.

The Terres-de-Meuse Tourist Office wants to expand the offer and thus make the destination more attractive to visitors. Innovation is sought in order to stand out with new services. The association puts great effort in continuously improving the website, the first window for the visitor, by incorporating powerful and attractive modules. In a few months, a whole new reception area will be operational, offering visitors a tailor-made service according to their expectations and wishes. In terms of larger-scale projects being developed can be mentioned:

- further development of the network of the node-point system,
- the presence of the Terres-de-Meuse Tourist Office in the "Liège-Nancy river tourism" working group.

In short, tourism developments in Huy-Waremme are closely interconnected with other provincial policy initiatives and with developments in other regions of the programme area. Therefore, the

arrondissements of Huy and Waremme possess good opportunities to translate developments like this into global projects for the development of the tourism sector in the Meuse-Rhine area, constituting a unique opportunity for the territory and representing a real opportunity for building a partnership with cross-border value. Based on current connections, qualities and opportunities, Huy and Waremme as functional areas are closely connected to the programme area.

- Kreisfreie Städte Düsseldorf and Duisburg (DE)

Both Düsseldorf and Duisburg can deliver experience and know-how from previous (project) activities to contribute to the development of high-quality tourism in the programme area, of which the experience of two recent exemplary projects of Tourismus NRW e.V. (umbrella organisation responsible for implementing NRW tourism strategy) is of particular interest:

1. "Tourist data management North Rhine-Westphalia - open, interconnected, digital": this project is about the preparation and utilisation of tourist data for all tourism stakeholders in order to increase the visibility of the offer. This is thematically consistent with the focus on data management/digitisation in the programme.
2. "Flow.NRW": this project, with Düsseldorf Tourismus GmbH and Ruhr Tourismus GmbH (including Duisburg) as partners, regards the polycentric urban jungle from the Rhineland to the Ruhr as a creative metropolitan region and initiates networking and joint marketing of tourism and the creative industries. Flow.NRW is developing this creative metropolitan region not only as a tourist destination, but also as an attractive place to live. The project's creative and innovative approach is in line with the goal of "innovative tourism offer" in the programme.

In addition to their experience in the field of tourism, cooperation with Düsseldorf and Duisburg on tourism allows core programme area actors access to the valuable network that has been created in the framework of strategic projects.

The city of Duisburg belongs to the Ruhr region, which is represented and marketed by the Ruhrgebiet Tourismus GmbH. Accordingly, there is a wide range of experience with the cooperation of various (tourism) actors and with the joint marketing of a diverse tourism offer. This experience can be valuable when it comes to promoting the programme area, which also has a very diverse structure, in a coordinated way. In terms of tourism development and marketing, Duisburg and Düsseldorf focus on the topics of cycle tourism and (industrial) heritage and culture. Experience gained there in recent years, for example with regard to inter-municipal cooperation, can also be useful in the programme area.

Düsseldorf Tourismus GmbH is currently working on a so-called Territorial Strategy Concept for Sustainable Tourism, Culture and Natural Heritage, which analyses the development needs of a region as well as its potentials by means of an integrated approach in order to identify goals, strategies and fields of action. The experience gained could be useful for an exchange and cooperation with the core programme area and the programme goals to strategically address tourism in a sustainable and integrated way.

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to enhance the role of high-quality and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation throughout the programme area, with the support of the strategic partners additionally participating based on the functional area principle. Their involvement will reinforce a concentrated effort and the development of solutions to the common challenges the tourism sector is facing today, like the Covid-19 crisis, the contribution to achieving the

Green Deal goals and the vulnerability to climate change. The coordinated approach on specific sub-fields of tourism shares some characteristics with Community Led (Local) Development approaches.

Participation of project partners from areas outside the programme and functional area is unconditionally possible. To name additional areas in the operational programme is therefore a mere emphasis of why certain areas are of a special interest.

2.3.4.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

SO 4.vi is aimed at supporting the tourism sector to recover from the COVID 19-crisis and to develop a higher quality offer of tourism products and services. Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen. This is further substantiated by the fact that the amount of income generating projects will be limited and the generated income out of any investments is expected to be very low.

2.3.4.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.vi.	027	€ 4.229.527
3	ERDF	4.vi.	165	€ 2.114.764
3	ERDF	4.vi.	167	€ 2.114.764

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.vi.	01	€ 8.459.055

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	4.vi.	33	€ 8.459.055

2.4. Better cooperation governance in the Meuse-Rhine area

This priority focuses on further enabling, strengthening and improving of cross-border cooperation between actors and structures, reducing border barriers and promoting cross-border contacts and joint administrative cooperation, in order to overcome border effects.

☒ This is NOT a priority pursuant to a transfer under Article 17(3)

2.4.1. Specific objective ISO 1.ii.

ISO 1.ii. Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions

2.4.1.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

The selection of this specific objective is inspired by the European Commission's publications "Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions" (2017) and "EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration" (2021). It is a fact that, despite the implementation of successive Interreg programmes, border regions still face border obstacles that hinder economic and social interaction across borders. In border regions, different legislations and administrative traditions may clash. In addition, there are information backlogs and infrastructural bottlenecks, which have an impact on the free movement of people, goods and services.

It is also a fact that there is insufficient integrated and structural administrative cooperation in border regions in general, despite years of stimulating cross-border cooperation. However, it is clear that this cooperation clearly has concrete cross-border added value and can yield economies of scale for the parties involved. Strong cross-border cooperation can turn a national peripheral border region into an economically and socially thriving Euregion. This added value and economies of scale for all parties involved will only really be achieved if cooperation goes beyond the level of information exchange and if there is genuine policy coordination and investment to implement policy agendas and tackle joint social problems.

That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) focuses on improving legal and administrative cooperation between actors. It is assumed that the added value of this is greatest within the grand societal challenges *Healthier inhabitants, Live and Work without Borders* and *Green Transformation*, and more specifically on the topics of labour market, security/safety, mobility and cross-border health care. Better legal and administrative cooperation can focus on removing both hard and soft obstacles.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of actions are eligible for support:

- analysis and research into legal and administrative obstacles in the border region, research into (feasibility of) solutions and measures to promote such solutions;
- active solving of systemic differences in laws and regulations with impeding effects in the cross-border context;
- improving administrative and civil service cooperation, policy making and implementation, including networking and monitoring;
- euregional e-products and services, such as e-ticketing for public transport, culture, etc;
- improving the provision of information to inhabitants and entrepreneurs about opportunities on the other side of the border;
- training of employees in organisations with an information or advisory function to the other side of the border;
- public safety actions;
- resilience actions to disasters occurring in the programme area, closely related to the defined societal challenges for this specific objective;
- border focal point, aimed at addressing specific cross-border problems and directing them to the appropriate level or institution for resolution;
- small projects fund for taking administrative and legal actions.

This specific objective allows for regular Interreg projects, but also for small projects under one pillar of a small project fund.

This specific objective is intended to cover topics and operations which cannot be dealt with under priorities 1, 2 and 3, and supports actions visible and close to the population. A single small projects fund will be developed and run by the small projects fund manager, with one pillar (under this specific objective) and another pillar under the next specific objective ISO 1.iii to support small people-to-people actions.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.4.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
4	ISO 1.ii.	RCO 81 – INT	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participations	38	750
4	ISO 1.ii.	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	4	80
4	ISO 1.ii.	RCO 117 – INT	Solutions for legal or administrative obstacles across borders identified	Number of solutions	1	15

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO 1.ii.	RCR 82 – INT	Legal or administrative obstacles across borders alleviated or resolved	Number of obstacles alleviated or resolved	0	2021	10	Monitoring system	Ambition is to resolve or alleviate 2/3 of the target set under RCO 117 - INT. Thus $2/3 * 15 = 10$.
4	ISO 1.ii.	RCR 84 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number of organisations	0	2021	56	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 70% of the organisations that have participated will remain cooperating across border after project completion. Thus, $0,7 * \text{RCO 87 final target} = 56$.

2.4.1.3. Main target groups

For regular Interreg projects (i.e. outside the small projects fund), the following main target groups (not limitative list) are potential beneficiaries under this specific objective:

- (semi-)public authorities;
- research and educational institutes;
- public-private partnerships;
- civil society groups;
- care organisations;
- public transport organisations;
- intermediary organisations or trade associations;
- (associations of) inhabitants;
- enterprises.

For the small projects fund pillar on legal obstacles, the sole beneficiary is EGTC EMR as the envisaged small projects fund manager. The list of final recipients under the small projects fund, where the financial support ultimately ends up, is broad. Further requirements will be formulated in specific calls for proposal to be launched by the EGTC EMR.

2.4.1.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to enhance legal and administrative cooperation throughout the programme area. There is no further demarcation within it, or demarcation in the form of specific territories. Nor does it make use of territorial or area-based tools.

2.4.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

ISO 1.ii is aimed at improving legal and administrative cooperation between actors. Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen.

2.4.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.ii.	173	€ 3.676.039

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.ii.	01	€ 3.676.039

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.ii.	33	€ 3.676.039

2.4.2 Specific objective ISO 1.iii.

ISO 1.iii. Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions

2.4.2.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Introduction

This specific objective has been selected to enable people-to-people actions by, for, through and with inhabitants. The aim is to raise awareness for cross-border cooperation among inhabitants and entrepreneurs, to enhance the experience in the border area, to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the programme area and to build up mutual trust. The available resources for this specific objective will be deployed entirely through a small projects fund for small projects in the form of mainly people-to-people actions to stimulate cross-border meetings, cooperation and overcome everyday problems for inhabitants and entrepreneurs has proven its added value in previous Interreg programmes in the area and clearly meets a need. The aim is to achieve more long-term cooperation between actors.

That is why Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) wants to continue people-to-people actions by, for, through and with inhabitants. It is assumed that the added value of this is greatest within the grand societal challenges *Healthier inhabitants, Live and Work without Borders* and *Green Transformation*. However, by simplification of the management of the small projects fund and the people-to-people actions, this tool should become more attractive for new categories of actions and target groups.

Types of action

Within this specific objective, the following types of people-to-people actions are eligible for support:

- information meetings;
- cultural days;
- festivals;
- sporting events;
- publications;

The types of action will be worked out in more detail by the small projects fund manager (EGTC EMR), to give further direction during implementation.

This specific objective is intended to cover topics and operations which cannot be dealt with under priorities 1, 2 and 3, visible and close to inhabitants. A single small projects fund will be developed and run by the small projects fund manager, with one pillar dedicated to take administrative and legal actions under specific objective ISO 1.ii and a second pillar (this one) under specific objective ISO 1.iii to support people-to-people actions.

The types of action under this specific objective have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH-principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature. For further substantiation, we refer to the addendum to the SEA Screening.

2.4.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
4	ISO 1.iii.	RCO 81 – INT	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participations	13	250
4	ISO 1.iii.	RCO 87 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number of organisations	3	60

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO 1.iii.	RCR 84 – INT	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number of organisations	0	2021	42	Monitoring system	Assumption is that 70% of the organisations that have participated will remain cooperating across border after project completion. Thus, 0,7 * RCO 87 final target = 42.

2.4.2.3. Main target groups

The sole beneficiary under this specific objective is EGTC EMR as the envisaged small projects fund manager.

We foresee the following (not limitative list of) different main target groups as final recipients under the small projects funds:

- primary and secondary schools, or the legal entities managing them;
- (associations of) inhabitants, with a particular focus to youth;
- civil society groups and NGOs (associations and foundations);
- SMEs;
- (semi-)public authorities;
- public-private partnerships.

Although the initiative to submit applications for people-to-people actions should be broad and bottom-up, the EGTC EMR can also focus top-down on certain types of actions or on certain categories of target groups in a given call. Further requirements will be formulated in specific calls for proposal.

2.4.2.4. Indication of specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) aims to enable people-to-people actions throughout the programme area. There is no further demarcation within it, or demarcation in the form of specific territories. Nor does it make use of territorial or area-based tools.

2.4.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

At the start of the programme, the basic position is to only give support to actions in the form of grants to beneficiaries and not to make use of financial instruments.

This is motivated by the fact that setting up a financial instrument under a multinational package of laws and regulations is extremely complex. In addition, a financial instrument is always based on one identifiable borrowing organisation, which is not in line with the principle of cross-border cooperation in this Interreg programme, involving multiple organisations.

ISO 1.iii is aimed at enabling people-to-people actions by, for, through and with inhabitants. Goal is to raise awareness for cross-border cooperation among inhabitants and entrepreneurs, to enhance the experience in the border area, to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the programme area and to build up mutual trust. Referring to the types of action described in the programme, grants under the umbrella of a small projects fund are believed to be the most appropriate form of support. The possibility of using loans and/or guarantees is not foreseen.

2.4.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.iii.	173	€ 2.090.347

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.iii.	01	€ 2.090.347

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO 1.iii.	33	€ 2.090.347

3. Financing plan

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

<i>Fund</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2026</i>	<i>2027</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>ERDF</i>	€ 0	€ 21.469.443	€ 21.814.305	€ 22.166.066	€ 22.524.861	€ 18.664.566	€ 19.037.854	€ 125.677.095
<i>(cross-border cooperation)</i>								
<i>IPA III CBC⁶</i>								
<i>NDICI-CBC⁷</i>								
<i>IPA III⁸</i>								
<i>NDICI⁹</i>								
<i>OCTP¹⁰</i>								
<i>Interreg funds¹¹</i>								
<i>Total</i>								

The financial appropriations by year have been drawn up on the basis of Annex XIV to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1131 of 5 July 2021. The allocation to year 2021 has been distributed evenly to the years 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025.

3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

⁶ *Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation*

⁷ *Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation*

⁸ *Interreg B and C*

⁹ *Interreg B and C*

¹⁰ *Interreg C and D*

¹¹ *ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C*

Table 8*

Policy objective No	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a) = (a1) + (a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)
					Without TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a1)	For TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
1	Priority 1	ERDF	Total eligible cost	€ 44.351.489	€ 41.449.990	€ 2.901.499	€ 17.764.281	€ 12.434.997	€ 5.329.284	€ 62.115.770	71,4%	€ 0
		IPA III CBC ¹²		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		NDICI-CBC ¹³		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		IPA III ¹⁴		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		NDICI ¹⁵		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		OCTP ¹⁶		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		Interreg funds ¹⁷		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Priority 2	(funds as above)		€ 39.912.817	€ 37.301.699	€ 2.611.118	€ 15.986.442	€ 13.588.476	€ 2.397.966	€ 55.899.259	71,4%	€ 0
4	Priority 3	(funds as above)		€ 35.242.756	€ 32.937.156	€ 2.305.600	€ 14.115.924	€ 13.692.446	€ 423.478	€ 49.358.680	71,4%	€ 0
ISO 1	Priority 4	(funds as above)		€ 6.170.033	€ 5.766.386	€ 403.647	€ 2.471.308	€ 2.347.743	€ 123.565	€ 8.641.341	71,4%	€ 0
	Total	All funds	Total eligible cost	€ 125.677.095	€ 117.455.231	€ 8.221.864	€ 50.337.955	€ 42.063.662	€ 8.274.293	€ 176.015.050	71,4%	€ 0
	Total	(funds as above)	Total eligible cost	€ 125.677.095	€ 117.455.231	€ 8.221.864	€ 50.337.955	€ 42.063.662	€ 8.274.293	€ 176.015.050	71,4%	€ 0

¹² Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation

¹³ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation

¹⁴ Interreg B and C

¹⁵ Interreg B and C

¹⁶ Interreg C and D

¹⁷ ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C

4. Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Involvement of partners in all stages of the programme cycle is an important principle guiding the development and implementation of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). Various stakeholders across the programme area have been involved in the elaboration of the Interreg 2021-2027 programme. The concrete involvement of these stakeholders throughout the preparation phase and the role that will be allocated to the partners during the implementation of the programme is detailed in this chapter.

Involvement during the preparation process

All 13 programme partners have been involved in the preparation process of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). Taking into account the provisions of the European regulations and the objectives of the partners, the **Working Group 2021-2027** (WG Post 2020) first prepared a draft programme outline.

The WG Post 2020 was formed by representatives of the programme partners, including the regions with whom the programme had privileged partnerships during Interreg 5. In the WG Post 2020, ideas and directions concerning the content, budget, governance and partnership have been discussed for the new programme, after which MA/JS prepared new working documents and/or drafts of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) for the next meetings. In this way, a working process was created in which the new Interreg programme was created step by step. The first WG Post 2020 meeting was on 11 February 2019, followed by another 4 meetings in 2019, 6 meetings in 2020, 21 meetings in 2021, and 9 meetings (so far) in 2022.

During this process, two public consultation rounds were organised, to consult the general public / civil society and also to collect input for improvement.

The first public consultation was based on the first choices/orientation of the content of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), and intended to generate first reactions on the direction of the new programme. The programme outline was presented to the participants of the **stakeholder conference** “Working together across borders - Interreg EMR 2021-2027” on 24 October 2019 in the Maastricht Congress Center (MECC). Approximately 150 policy makers, knowledge institutions, intermediaries, companies and societal organisations were invited, resulting in a broad representation of actors from the programme area. During the stakeholder conference, all participants were able to input and discuss their objectives, ideas and wishes.

Both the programme partners and the participants of the stakeholder conference expressed the aim to concentrate the strategic objectives of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) around a limited number of societal and economical challenges in the border area, within which there would be room for a multi-sectoral approach with a focus on the core sectors of the area. Moreover, an **extensive analysis of external sources** has taken place to further specify major challenges and strategic objectives. These external sources consist of documents such as the country-specific recommendations for Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands and the Border Orientation Paper for the EMR of the European Commission, as well as the socio-economic analysis, SWOT and policy documents and strategies from the programme partners.

Combining the input from partners, stakeholders and the document analysis, the programme partners have formulated five **grand societal challenges** that count as the profile, ambition and storyline of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

In the course of 2020 and 2021, the WG Post 2020 has further elaborated and developed this in subsequent steps, by further discussing the formulation of the grand societal challenges for the Meuse-Rhine area and also with the aim of further rationalising the number of specific objectives. An important follow-up step in this process is the creation of a matrix in which the menu list of Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives prescribed by the European Commission is set against the societal challenges for the Meuse-Rhine area. At this stage, the desk officer of the European Commission provided valuable input on how each of the specific objectives should be interpreted. In this way, the WG Post 2020 has tried to achieve a further tightening of the number of topics and specific objectives of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) as well as a high degree of consensus.

This led ultimately to the selection of **five grand societal challenges** with a cross-border impact on the entire programme area and which also guides the allocation of resources from Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE).

- Industrial Transition;
- Green Transformation;
- Healthier inhabitants;
- Tourism in a High-Quality Region;
- Live and Work without Borders.

In the follow-up process, thematic and content-related experts have been consulted in order to sharpen the focus on what the main challenges are concretely for each topic and how they can be addressed, thinking concretely about possible actions in the implementation phase. The following digital (because of social distancing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19) **expert sessions** have taken place:

- Expert session: Renewable energy in combination with Industrial Transition (8 September 2020) – 2 participants;
- Expert session: Tourism (4 November 2020) – 8 participants;
- Expert session: Climate Action/Adaptation (21 January 2021) - 7 participants;
- Expert session: Industrial Transition (26 January 2021) - 17 participants;
- Expert session: Health (26 January 2021) - 13 participants;
- Expert session: Circular Economy (27 January 2021) - 10 participants;
- Expert session: Second on Tourism (10 February 2021) – 11 participants;
- Expert session: Second on Renewable energy (11 March 2021) - 19 participants.

During the preparations of these sessions, every programme partner was asked to suggest experts on the above-mentioned themes. This has resulted in a broad pool of experts from the business community, educational and knowledge institutes and other relevant civil society organisations.

In addition, a broad **public consultation** has been organised on 30 November 2020. This was also a digital conference. About 1.700 people have been invited to this public consultation, based on participants of previous events, the programme's contact list, social media and website contacts. Special attention was given to the young generation, by inviting students from Zuyd Hogeschool and Maastricht

University. About 250 persons have registered for the public consultation. In total 177 participants have actually taken part in the public consultation, taking note of the actual set-up and content of (the draft) Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and providing valuable input and ideas for the further elaboration of the programme and the implementation process thereafter.

In addition to these events at programme level, the various programme partners also held information meetings in their own regions. On 17 March 2021, Flanders reached for example 68 people with an Interreg Meuse-Rhine specific event. Attendants were mostly from the programme area or nearby. They included both newcomers as experienced project organisations. Participants encompassed all programme themes and types of organisations targeted by the programme. Next to this, Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) has also been presented combined with other Interreg or EU funds (Regional ERDF-programmes, Horizon, Creative Europe, Transport, Life), with attendance on average of 200-300 people.

Ultimately, the programme has been finished and approved by the programme partners beginning of 2022. On 28 September 2022, the content of the programme has been presented at the Launch Event in Hasselt, consisting of a High Level Meeting and a Public Event.

Involvement during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The clear objective is to involve relevant programme partners during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme. The programme partners are represented in the following implementing bodies:

- Monitoring Committee
- Steering Committee

The Dutch Province of Limburg will manage Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) as the **Managing Authority** and has the responsibility to set up a separate structure for the implementation of the programme, known as the **Joint Secretariat**. It provides assistance to the MA and the other programme bodies, it provides information to potential beneficiaries and it provides assistance to beneficiaries and partners.

The programme partners will remain involved in the implementation, for example through their participation in the **Monitoring Committee (MC)** and the **Steering Committee (SC)**. The MC oversees the management and implementation of the programme. The SC decides which projects will be selected. Both committees will be designed and organised with reference to article 8 of the CPR, stating that a partnership shall be organised with a clear political-administrative representation, supplemented by socio-economic partners. Therefore, the following partners will be represented in these committees:

- urban and other public authorities
- economic and social partners
- research institutions and universities
- relevant bodies representing civil society, environmental partners, bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination.

The European Commission, the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action are also part of the MC.

The concrete details and arrangements for the set-up of the MC and SC are still being worked out, but will be ready and operational at the latest within three months of formal adoption of the programme.

Synergy and complementarity with other EU programmes will be taken into account during the whole programme life cycle, as well as in the composition of the MC and SC.

European Code of Conduct on Partnership

The programme partners of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) have taken into account the 'European Code of Conduct on Partnership' (Regulation (EU) Nr. 240/2014). This is interpreted as follows:

- Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is transparent in the selection of partners during the preparation and implementation of the programme;
- The programme provides sufficient information to partners and give them sufficient time to make their voice heard in the consultation process;
- The programme ensures that partners are involved in all stages of the process, from planning to evaluation;
- MA/JS supports capacity building of partners, by providing targeted support and training to potential applicants, especially to new target audiences such as citizen cooperatives and other civil society organisations. This is mainly done by means of webinars and providing online information (see also chapter 5).
- The programme creates platforms for mutual learning and exchange of good practice.

European initiatives

The programme partners follow and support the European initiatives. For example, they have taken note of the initiatives 'A new European Bauhaus' and 'European Quality Principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact upon cultural heritage'; these will be given due consideration in the implementation of the programme.

In implementing the programme, the MA will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support strategic objectives (including professionalisation efforts to address institutional capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to pay more attention to quality and life-cycle cost criteria. Where possible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social aspects and incentives for innovation should be included in public procurement procedures.

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Target audiences

We distinguish three main target audiences, with separate subgroups:

1. (Potential) beneficiaries / applicants

2. Inhabitants and political actors

3. Other stakeholders

Objectives

Effective communication around Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) will help the Interreg community to support and empower each other in fulfilling a common mission and vision under the guidance of EU Cohesion Policy. The main focus is on making projects and their contribution to the programme's objectives understandable to the public. Objectives per target group are:

1. (Potential) beneficiaries / applicants

- To increase awareness about Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE);
- To attract (potential) applicants to apply for funding with relevant, good quality applications;
- To inform transparently about funding possibilities, project requirements, policies, processes and decision-making;
- To help (potential) beneficiaries to communicate actively and effectively about projects;

MA/JS wants to provide clear guidance to beneficiaries. We develop templates in advance and make them available in order to harmonise the communication statements of beneficiaries. This is not meant to be prescriptive, but to be clear in what is required and, where there is, give room for own initiative. Three categories for communication products are being considered:

- Category 1 'Required': This comprises the development and implementation of a standard set of required products at a standard price. The compulsory set contains a standard logo, a standard website (fixed for layout, mobile phone proof, including an automatic translation option, and in harmony with website accessibility rules), A3 posters, plaque (if applicable), predefined promotional material, service contract for updating the website and still to be investigated, a final report in form of an infographic and a GDPR guideline.
- Category 2 'Optional': These are communication products, prepared by MA/JS as examples/templates to be considered by beneficiaries and to be custom-made in their own projects. MA/JS helps beneficiaries to think about how the optional products can be made project-specific. Examples include stationary, press releases, digital newsletter, banners, folders, screens for facilities, social media, PR and event guidelines (kick-off / end event or information meetings).
- Category 3 'Individual': This encompasses the choice of own, individual communication products, like social media channels.

2. Inhabitants and other public actors

- Increase awareness of the general public of the Interreg programme as well as projects funded;

- Inform about the effects of the use of EU resources, resulting in tangible results that bring added value in people's lives;
- Inform about the cross-border cooperation on the scale of the programme area.

With regard to our communication to the general public, more active use will be made of social media.

3. Other stakeholders

- Inform about and to involve other stakeholders in the programme,
- Inform about the progress, results and added value of the programme.

Communication channels

We choose a cross-media approach when using communication channels and resources. The emblem of the EU will be prominently featured on all communication materials, alongside the statement "(Co)funded by the European Union". Communication channels we are going to use are:

1. Programme website

The website www.interreg-meuse-rhine.eu is our most important source of information for all target audiences. Information for (potential) beneficiaries and intermediaries can be quickly found and understood and projects are clearly visible. The project portfolio is updated regularly. MA/JS also publishes information about coming calls.

2. Online media

- Social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Instagram is a new channel for us, to reach a younger target group;
- Public version of the annual report;
- An improved digital newsletter;
- External channels of programme partners;
- Online community for beneficiaries (such as an Interreg Teams Network).

3. Events

- Working visits;
- Webinars and workshop on communication (guidelines, tips & tricks, templates);
- Publicity moments;
- Media campaigns.

4. Visual media

- Corporate movie about the programme.

5. Printed media (also made available digitally if possible)

- Factsheets about funding calls;
- Advertorials in relevant magazines and newspapers;
- In-depth articles and press releases.

To measure the output, results and impact of communication actions, a specific set of communication indicators has been developed. One example of an indicator for each of the three categories is:

- Output: website visitors,

-
- Result: Percentage of beneficiaries declaring they would apply again to the programme,
 - Impact: Number of people having a more positive opinion of the programme.
- More on this can be found in the specific annex “Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation of communication activities Interreg Meuse-Rhine”.

Regarding OSIs, the JS, RAs, programme partners and beneficiaries will work together in communicating about these projects. Storytelling is a suitable way of sharing the importance of the OSIs in an understandable way.

The overall communication budget for this programme amounts to € 1.14 million.

6. Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

In Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), as in the Interreg EMR V programme, the possibility of stimulating small-scale projects will be utilised. This will be done specifically within Interreg Specific Objective 1.ii under priority 4, where part of the allocated funds will be used to support small-scale projects via a small project fund. Another pillar of the small project fund will support small people-to-people actions under Interreg Specific Objective 1.iii. The small projects offer an excellent opportunity for many target groups, such as inhabitants, regional and local organisations and authorities, to cooperate across borders in a small-scale manner in terms of content. The small project fund focuses on legal, administrative and social aspects of cross-border cooperation and has the overarching goal of reducing the barrier effect of the border. The small project fund will be managed by the EGTC EMR, which acts as Lead Partner. In that role, the EGTC EMR is also responsible to ensure that final recipients comply with the communication requirements as pointed out in chapter 5. The further substantive and financial elaboration will follow at a later date.

It is not foreseen, but also not excluded, that during the implementation of the programme another small project fund will be set up under one of the other specific objectives. It may be necessary to establish a small project fund for the innovation scheme under SO 1.iii, depending on the further elaboration of the innovation scheme.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Table 10

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing authority, including the accounting function	Province of Limburg (NL)	Mr. Rob van Vugt as coordinator of Cluster EMR	r.van.vugt@prvlimburg.nl
National authority (for programmes with participating third countries, if appropriate)	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Audit authority	Audit Department of Dutch Ministry of Finance	Mr. Martin de Witte	m.l.a.witte@minfin.nl
Group of auditors representatives	To be decided yet	To be decided yet	To be decided yet
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Province of Limburg (NL)	Mr. Mark Vos as coordinator of Cluster EMR	mrp.vos@prvlimburg.nl

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

On the basis of Article 46 (2) of the ETC Regulation, the MA has taken the initiative for setting up a Joint Secretariat (JS), with sufficient multi-lingual staffing to carry out its tasks in an efficient and timely manner, and also taking into account the programme partnership. The JS assists in the implementation of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and provides administrative support to the Interreg programme authorities (Art 45 ETC (1 and 2)), the Monitoring Committee and the Steering Committee. But above all: the JS is the key interface between the programme and the (potential) beneficiaries.

As in the 2014-2020 programming period, the JS is responsible for carrying out all technical-administrative tasks related to the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). The JS operates from Maastricht (domicile of MA) and is guided in its work and planning by the MA, as far as the planning of its activities is concerned.

The JS has the following tasks:

- Providing general information about Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and calls to potential beneficiaries;
- General project acquisition for calls;
- Being the point of contact for applicants during the process of project development;
- Assessing project applications against the technical and financial regulations and on the Interreg objectives and cross-border added value, ultimately leading to advice to the Steering Committee for project selection;
- Quality management measures and coordination with the regional antennas;

-
- Supervising approved projects and monitoring the implementation, including performing management verifications at project level;
 - Monitoring the financial and content progress of the programme;
 - Performing the accounting function for the programme;
 - Supporting the MA in managing the programme;
 - Reporting to and communication with the European Commission;
 - Preparation and running of the Steering Committee and Monitoring Committee meetings;
 - Taking care of the communication and publicity of the programme and supervising the communication of projects;
 - Execution of evaluation actions, based on an evaluation plan.

JS will be supported in these tasks by Regional Antennas (RAs) based in the subregions of the programme area, and partly financed from Technical Assistance. The RAs predominantly focus on project acquisition and programme communication. They are MA/JS's regional pillars. On the one hand they have a good understanding of the programme strategy and its opportunities, have a programme area wide cross-border vision and profound knowledge of the programme's intervention logic and regulatory framework. On the other hand they possess detailed knowledge of the specific socio-economic structure of their territory, have access to key actors in the sectors targeted by the programme and knowledge of the structuring ecosystems in their particular region.

The RAs may not intervene and are not involved in the assessment and selection processes of projects, in order to avoid potential conflict of interest. They are also not allowed to represent their region in any programme committee. In close coordination with JS, the RAs can assist in supporting projects and beneficiaries during the implementation stage and closure.

Clear management agreements are extremely important in this decentralised set-up. An agreement with legal status formalises the RA's operational management by the MA coordinator on the one hand and management on personnel matters by the RA's employer on the other. A newly created position of Teamleader RAs within MA/JS organises an effective coordination and cooperation between the RAs and the other functions within MA/JS.

With regard to e-cohesion and electronic data exchange, the MA will set up and introduce an electronic data exchange system (JEMS) for the implementation of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) that meets the requirements as set out in Annex XIV to the CPR. The electronic data exchange system will also be capable of electronically transmitting cumulative programme data to the EC.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

The apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and programme partners in the event of financial corrections imposed by the MA or the European Commission is regulated in the Partnership Agreement for Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), Article 3.

The relevant parts are Article 3 (2), (3) and (5):

(2) In the case of amounts unduly paid and to be recovered by the European Commission (Article 52 of Regulation (EU) Nr. 2021/1059), the MA shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the lead or the sole partner. Partners have to repay to the lead partner any amounts unduly paid. In case that the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from other partners, or where the MA does not succeed in securing payment from the lead or sole partner, the Member State in which the partner concerned is located, will reimburse the MA any amounts unduly paid to that partner. The MA is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the in Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) participating Member States. Once the involved Member State has reimbursed the MA any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner pursuant to its national law. In the event of successful recovery, the involved Member State may use those amounts for the national co-financing of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). The MA will make every effort to ensure that unduly paid amounts are recovered. Besides informing the Member States as early as possible and formally requesting the reimbursement from the lead partner and other partners of the project, all other possible means will be explored and implemented, including transfer of rights to the Member State concerned.

(3) The liability among the funding countries in Interreg Maas-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) is determined on the basis of each their share in the total ERDF allocation to the programme.

(5) In the case of flat rate or extrapolated financial corrections made by the European Commission linked to one or more systemic error(s) for which it is not possible to determine the respective responsibilities of the Member States of the programme, the MA shall propose to the Monitoring Committee to decide on the distribution of the amount between the Member States on the basis of the irregularity and the circumstances in which it occurred. In case of disagreement between the Member States on this apportionment, the financial responsibility shall be shared among the Member States participating in Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE). Each Member State's share shall be calculated in proportion to the ERDF amounts allocated to the programme.

The impact of possible financial corrections on the available funds for Technical Assistance, in particular the financing of TA-costs among programme partners in case of insufficient ERDF-budget for TA due to financial corrections, has also been addressed in the Partnership Agreement (article 4).

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Table 11: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

<u>Intended use of Articles 94 and 95</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<u>From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

APPENDICES

Map 1: Map of the programme area

Appendix 1: **Union contribution** based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates – not applicable

Appendix 2 Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs – not applicable

Appendix 3a: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable

Map 1: Map of the programme area Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE)



Appendix 1: *Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates*¹⁸

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	

Not applicable.

Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	

Not applicable.

Appendix 3a: List of planned operations of strategic importance *with a timetable*

An 'operation of strategic importance' (OSI) provides a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of a programme and is subject to particular monitoring and communication measures (CPR).

The programme partners propose the OSIs listed below:

1. OSI under the framework of SO 2.4, aimed at reducing the negative impact or even preventing of floods in the programme area (flood protection measures, more room for rivers to flow, better water storage), which are expected to occur more frequent as a result of global warming,
2. OSI under SO 4.5, aimed at better coordination and cooperation between medical and care organisations in the programme area, in view of a care sector that is under great pressure due to Covid-19, the scarcity of sufficient (qualified) personnel, but also due to the ageing population and the ever-increasing cost of care.
3. OSI within SO 1.3, aimed at increased cooperation between innovation funding agencies/intermediaries in the programme area leading to improved and joint cross-border instruments to support and increase direct SME-to-SME innovation cooperation in the area. The OSI will ultimately also harness cross-border behaviour by SMEs and make SMEs more resilient in terms of innovation capacity to produce products, services, and solutions of shared benefit to the area.

The projects listed above make a significant contribution to achieving the objectives of Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) and are therefore of strategic importance. The programme committees retain their prerogatives with regard to the launch and development of calls for proposals and the selection of projects within the framework of these OSIs. The funding of these OSIs is also subject to the proviso, that they meet the programme's project selection criteria and procedures.

The programme partners want to leave the option open to identify one overall flagship per OSI-topic, or to seek for several projects under the main OSI during the implementation period.

The JS, RAs, programme partners and beneficiaries will work together in communicating about these projects in accordance with the regulations. The use of both the communication channels of the JS and of the beneficiaries reinforces the message. Storytelling is a suitable way of sharing the importance of these OSIs in an understandable way.