

Introduction

The cross-border cooperation between EU Member States and Neighbourhood region was first established under European Neighbourhood policy and funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for the period 2007-2013 with the aim to promoting good neighbourhood relations and gradual economic integration of participating countries. This was further reconfirmed under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the period 2014-2020. In 2021-2027, the cooperation will be governed by the EU Cohesion policy and the programmes will be fully part of Interreg Territorial Cooperation component.

With the purpose to continuing supporting and strengthening cooperation in all its dimensions, as such cooperation is an important regional development policy tool, the European Union will support programmes under **cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation, interregional cooperation and outermost regions'** cooperation.

Interreg NEXT is the name of this generation of programmes that marks the transition of the ENI CBC community into the Interreg family. During the programming period 2021-2027, these cooperation programmes have an allocation of EUR 1.1 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA).

Interreg NEXT MED

Interreg NEXT MED Programme is the largest Interreg NEXT cooperation programme implemented under the **transnational** strand of the European territorial cooperation and covers the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The vision of the Programme is to contribute to the achievement of smart, sustainable, fair development for all across the Mediterranean basin by supporting balanced, long-lasting, far-reaching cooperation and multilevel governance.

Building on the positive cross-border cooperation experiences of the previous two programming periods, Interreg NEXT MED will continue supporting the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in a transnational dimension, both as a tool of the EU regional development policy and as part of European Neighbourhood Policy aiming at establishing an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness. The principles of mutual accountability, shared ownership and responsibility are the roots of this cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries.

As compared to the previous two programming periods, in 2021-2027 Interreg NEXT MED will expand its territorial and financial size to cover 15¹ countries and a significant EU budget allocation of 244 mln euro².

With regard to the cooperation challenges common to the territories involved in Interreg NEXT MED, the overall geography of the Programme area is dominated by the Mediterranean Sea Basin, one of the largest semi-enclosed seas with its 46,000 km of coastline and home to approximately 460 million people, of which

¹ The 15 participating Countries are: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, France, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

² Of which 222 mln euro for project financing and the remaining amount of 22 mln euro for programme management (technical assistance component).

1/3 concentrated in the coastal area. Albeit countries’ specificities, the Mediterranean basin is a coherent geographical area characterized by common trails facing governance, socio-economic, human, climatic and environmental challenges. This requires joint actions on both shores of the Mediterranean and in this respect Interreg NEXT MED intends to preserve this common living space and its unique ecosystem, by offering all stakeholders a framework to address common challenges, providing an unprecedented opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation.

The Programme strategy

The Programme strategy is rooted around the **3 European Policy Objectives** for smarter (PO1), greener (PO2), more social (PO4) Mediterranean and addressing the regional needs through the Interreg Specific Objective on better cooperation governance³ (ISO1).

By focussing on the green and digital transition as cross-cutting elements in its cooperation dimension, Interreg NEXT MED identifies **4 main priorities**, aligned with the identified EU **Policy Objectives** and **9 Specific Objectives** that best address the common challenges of the cooperation area.

Table 1: Interreg NEXT MED strategic framework by priority and specific objectives

| A more competitive & smarter Mediterranean | A greener, low-carbon, resilient Mediterranean | A more social & inclusive Mediterranean | A better cooperation governance |
|--|--|---|--|
| Research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies | Energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions | Inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning | Other actions to support better cooperation governance |
| Sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs | Access to water and sustainable water management | Health care and resilience of health systems, including primary care | |
| | Climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience | | |
| | Transition to a circular and resource efficient economy | | |

³ Corresponding, respectively, to the Policy objectives (POs) 1,2, 4 and the Interreg Specific Objective 1.

As per the budget distribution, financial resources will be allocated among priorities and policy objectives as follows:

Table 2: Budget distribution by priorities⁴

| Priority | % | EU Contribution | Co-financing | TOTAL |
|--------------|-----|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| PO1 | 30% | € 66.658.241 | € 8.147.118 | € 74.805.359 |
| PO2 | 40% | € 88.877.655 | € 10.862.824 | € 99.740.479 |
| PO4 | 22% | € 48.882.710 | € 5.974.553 | € 54.857.263 |
| ISO1 | 8% | € 17.775.531 | € 2.172.565 | € 19.948.096 |
| TOTAL | | € 222.194.136 | € 27.157.061 | € 249.351.197 |

Priority 1: A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean

The Programme will look at reducing gaps in research and innovation capacity, improving business productivity, ensuring territories and innovation actors learn from each other and establishing and reinforcing collaboration. The aim is to promote innovative and smart economic transformation as a mean to help reduce disparities and contribute to socio-economic integration through two main specific objectives:

- Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies to strengthen innovation processes, capacity and technology uptake, improve research business cooperation across the Programme area.

Example of eligible actions

Support for transnational testing and development of technologies, processes and services, and for the uptake of technology, technology transfer and commercialization of research outcomes and IP.

Support for transnational RD&I business-academia networking, partnerships, and platforms sharing know-how and results, improving transnational access, collaboration, mobility and synergies.

Support for business research and innovation activity, including investment in transnational research infrastructure and equipment.

- Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of MSMEs and job creation in MSMEs, including by productive investments to increase MSME creation, innovation, internationalization, competitiveness, productivity, entrepreneurship and to facilitate the incorporation of unemployed people and new entrants into the labour force and improve job creation.

Example of eligible actions

- Transnational support for the co-creation and follow up of start-ups and spin-offs, encouraging their entrepreneurship, innovation, diversification and growth
- Development and promotion of transnational clusters, value chains, living labs, for business networking and exchange of good practice

⁴ Excluding the technical assistance.

- Transnational skills development and measures to anticipate skills needs, increase entrepreneurship and improve the adaptability of enterprises, workers and entrepreneurs to change
- Transnational business support services, platforms and networks to support business internationalization, the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies, and business environment improvements
- Initiatives for the digital transformation of MSMEs

Priority 2: A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean

The creation of a greener, low carbon and resilient Mediterranean region, pursuing the ambitious environmental objectives set by the European Green Deal, is one of the key purposes of Interreg NEXT MED. The Programme will support the transition towards a net zero carbon economy, clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation through four specific objectives:

- Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, considering ecosystem-based approaches
- Promoting access to water and sustainable water management
- Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

Example of eligible actions

- Implementation of pilot actions to demonstrate technical, financial, and environmental benefits of measures
- Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilization of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities
- Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation and inclusion of citizens, civil society organisations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities
- Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of provisions and performance standards

Priority 3: A more social and inclusive Mediterranean

Social disparities, social exclusion and inequalities in opportunity are increasing across the Programme area. Young people, women and rural populations are amongst those most disadvantaged. In addition, the COVID-19 health crisis has exposed some of the vulnerabilities of the health and social care sectors across the Programme area and highlighted the disproportionate impact of a health emergency on disadvantaged groups.

Support transnational actions that aim at improving equal access to education and learning opportunities and ensuring that no-one is left behind in the economic recovery and digital and green transitions and also improving access to health care through the use of digitalization and technological innovation is of the

upmost importance across the Programme area. With these purposes Interreg NEXT MED will concentrate its action on the following two specific objectives:

- 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.

Example of eligible actions

- Transnational educational, training measures and partnerships to anticipate skills needs, including through on the job training and work experience
- Development of transnational platforms and digital infrastructures for e-learning and e-education
- Digital literacy programmes and initiatives especially among migrants, NEETs, youth, women, the under-privileged, long-term unemployed and rural populations
- Development of transnational/international partnerships, schemes, initiatives and innovations to improve education opportunities, quality, access and mobility for groups with specific barriers to participation (youth, women, migrants, asylum seekers (according to national provisions), long-term unemployed and persons with special needs)
- Transnational actions and services that promote gender equality, equal opportunities, social inclusion and socio-economic integration and empowerment

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

Example of eligible actions

- Development and pilot of transnational digital tools, innovations, applications and services to improve health care provision and enhance equal and timely access to quality services
- Measures to improve the resilience of the healthcare systems and capacity of civil society organisations and communities in healthcare, including transnational networking, capacity-building and training in healthcare improving preparedness and adaptation to pandemics and other health crises.

Priority 4: A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean

By investing on the Interreg specific objective to support better cooperation governance, so as to overcoming and removing obstacles to cooperation, the Programme will contribute to an enhanced dialogue, cooperation and integration among public administrations, citizens and other stakeholders in the ownership of the Programme and the use of its opportunities to jointly advance on issues of local interest through participatory, integrated processes for a sustainable and inclusive development.

- Other actions to support better cooperation governance

Example of eligible actions

- Promote and implement measures and joint actions to improve the institutional capacity of public authorities and other stakeholders, especially at the local level, to design and effectively

deliver public services for the socio-economic and environmental well-being of citizens and places.

- Develop and implement common tools to promote local governance processes by strengthening cross-sectoral, multilevel and transnational partnership, encouraging the cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in view of identifying and addressing issues of joint interest at local level through exchanges, bottom-up and participatory approaches.
- Design and implement tools and platforms, including digital ones, that create a more convenient access for citizens to public services and a better connection and dialogue between administrations and local stakeholders.

Programme indicators

In order to measure its performance, the programme has been equipped with a set of indicators selected as to ensure a broad coverage in terms of actions and budget allocated, but at the same time to keep the indicators framework clear and simple. A pragmatic approach and a clear and lean indicators framework allow to avoid putting a disproportionate burden on beneficiaries.

The indicators chosen are mostly Interreg indicators with one ERDF output indicator and two ERDF result indicators.

Table 3: Set of indicators output and result indicators:

| Code | Indicator title |
|--------|---|
| RC001 | Enterprises supported (of wich: micro, small, medium, large) |
| RC002 | Enterprises supported by grants |
| RC081 | Participations in joint actions across borders |
| RC082 | Participations in joint actions promoting gender |
| RC084 | Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects |
| RC085 | Participations in joint training schemes |
| RC087 | Organisations cooperating across borders |
| RC090 | Projects for innovation networks across borders |
| RC0116 | Jointly developed solutions |
| RCR01 | Jobs created in supported entities |
| RCR03 | Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) introducing product or process innovation |
| RCR81 | Completion of joint training schemes |
| RCR85 | Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion |
| RCR84 | Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion |
| RCR104 | Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations |

Description of type of support provided

To attain its policy objectives and specific objectives the Programme will launch calls for proposals to implement three **types of projects** described as follows:

Table 4: Type of projects

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Standard | The standard projects will have a demonstration character, providing pilot examples in a specific field of expertise, while ensuring networking among relevant stakeholders. Model for projects under the standard call, including “youth strand”, and under the “green transition” call. |
| Capitalisation | The capitalisation projects will promote the roll-out and exploitation of the successful practices and results of previously financed projects, in current and previous programmes, and other initiatives in the programme area. Model for Capitalisation call only. |
| Consolidation | This type of projects will support the continuation of highly successful activities that present a good opportunity to increase the impact of INTERREG NEXT MED projects. Model for Consolidation call only. |

All projects will have to demonstrate genuine **transnational character** and the activity will be implemented across the partnership territories. Irrespective of the call and their types, all projects will be requested to have the following elements:

- **Impact:** at least 50% of funds to be spent in MPCs
- **Budget:** the EU contribution can be up to 90% and the co-finance from projects a minimum of 10%
- **Partnership:** minimum 3 partners from 3 different countries, of which at least 1 from a MPC. A maximum of 3 organisations from the same country.

The proposal of the INTERREG NEXT MED Programme is to launch **four calls** for proposals in succession:

- A first **general call** for proposals will be launched at the beginning of the Programme. It will open to standard projects. It is proposed that part of the budget of this first call is ringfenced to create a “*youth strand*” i.e., for projects with strong participation from young beneficiaries.
- A second **thematic call** for proposals will focus on “green transition” and will be for standard projects. Although the thematic concentration is strongly focused on PO2, with four Specific Objectives, the call will be open to all relevant Specific Objectives.
- A third **capitalisation call** for proposals will be launched to support the capitalisation of the results relevant for the Programme area in the widest possible manner.
- A fourth **consolidation call** for proposals will be launched towards the end of the Programme to consolidate project results of the financed projects.

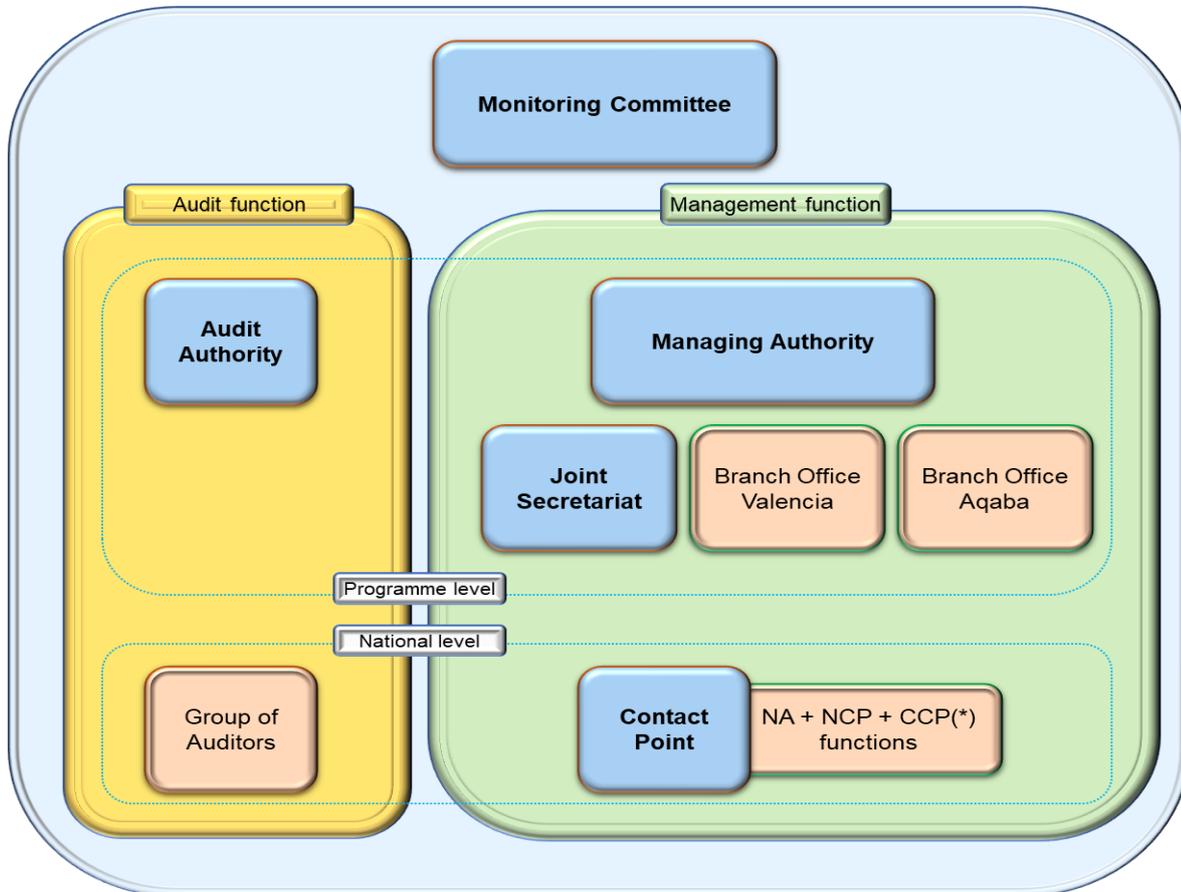
Governance structure

The proposal for the Governance of the Programme has been defined according to the EU regulatory framework and is built upon the capitalization of the experience gained from the previous ENI and ENPI CBC MED programmes.

The overall governance model is based upon the principles of:

- increasing the **participative** elements,
- bringing a higher level of **shared ownership** of the programme, and
- **strengthening its management mechanisms.**

Table 5: Governance structure



Indicative calendar

The submission of the Programme for approval by the European Commission is expected by summer 2022 with the Programme adoption by the end of 2022.

According to the provisional calendar, the first call for project proposals is expected to be launched by mid-2023.

Table 6: Provisional call calendar⁵

| Interreg NEXT MED | Year | 2023 | | | | 2024 | | | | 2025 | | | | 2026 | | | | 2027 | | | | 2028 | | | | 2029 | | | | 2030 | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|
| | Quarter | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
| Call 1 Standard & Youth (45%) | Launch | L | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Evaluation | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Implementation (R) | | | | | I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Implementation (Y) | | | | | | I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Call 2 Green Transition (35%) | Launch | | L | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Evaluation | | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Implementation | | | | | | I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Call 3 Capitalisation (15%) | Launch | | | | | | | | | | L | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Evaluation | | | | | | | | | | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Implementation | | | | | | | | | | | | I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Call 4 Consolidation (5%) | Launch | | | | | | | | | | | | | | L | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Evaluation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Implementation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

⁵ The percentages are related to the EU funds to be allocated for each call and they may vary upon decision to be taken by the Monitoring Committee.