

Interreg North-West Europe

Programme 2021-2027

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Disclaimer: This document has been approved by the North-West Europe Task Force as an advanced draft of the Interreg North-West Europe Programme 2021-2027. The document was drafted in compliance with Article 17 of the Interreg Regulation for the 2021-2027 period, according to the template annexed to the aforementioned regulation. Further information on the programming process for the Interreg North-West Europe Programme 2021-2027 can be found at <https://www.nweurope.eu/future-nwe-programme/>. Please note that the information provided in this document may still substantially change following negotiations with the concerned parties, namely the North-West Europe Task Force and the European Commission.

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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1 Programme area (to be completed)

1.2 Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs, complementarities and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learned 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

Programme strategy and scope

Since the industrial revolution, North West Europe has been at the vanguard of industrialisation and economic development in Europe. However, this century of growth came at a cost:

- On the environment
- On people
- On territorial inequalities

The Interreg NWE Programme is looking for ways to restore this. The NWE territorial analysis highlights specific territorial needs where action is required to reverse the trends of the past and to prepare regions for the sustainable transition towards better environmental conditions and new socio-economic opportunities. Territorial challenges and inequalities still persist. Some territories still suffer from the effects of structural change, while others have to deal with a shrinking population due to ageing and youth migration. Natural capital in the form of biodiversity, clear water, soil and air is endangered in many NWE territories and the effects of climate change bring urgent challenges. Moreover, imbalances in access to public services and employment exists. However, NWE also has a strong legacy of developing innovative, technological and social solutions to address development problems. In this context, NWE players have accumulated for many decades a vast experience to make the economy more sustainable and resource-efficient and to reduce adverse environmental and climate change effects.

Our challenge is now to accompany NWE territories to lead a sustainable and balanced development and reduce disparities. Using its transnational cooperation expertise, the programme 2021-2027 wants to jointly

*“promote a green, smart and just transition for all NWE territories
with the aim to support a balanced development and make all regions more resilient”.*

The programme will fund projects that contribute to the ‘green’ transition of all NWE territories to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and sustainable society. This transition is a major challenge for all territories and goes beyond the scope of this programme. Interreg NWE programme aims at the implementation and uptake of transnational and place-based solutions to contribute to the preservation of natural resources, the enhancement of nature-based solutions to climate change while supporting the energy and circular transition.

The transition shall be ‘smart’ in the sense that it will rely on the potential of technological innovation and digitalisation promoted by public and private stakeholders. In addition, integrated solutions will require innovative societal approaches and the engagement of citizens and social economy actors to create smart partnerships that facilitate the uptake of those solutions by the citizens and allow for a transformative innovation.

At the same time, the transition shall be ‘just’ in the sense that it will need to be inclusive and take on board all people and territories. Solutions need to be fair and integrated in the sense that they empower local communities. Projects shall address the specific needs of territories with particular territorial and socio-economic challenges and assist them in the transition to greener processes and systems.

Programme actions will support transnational cooperation involving public and private stakeholders, university and research, and civil society organisations from the different regions involved in the NWE programme area. The programme will contribute to increasing the capacity of communities to tackle relevant challenges of territorial development. It will support the elaboration and implementation of strategies and action plans, the development and testing of solutions as well as the organisation of related capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

The overall aim of the programme and of its actions is to contribute to a balanced development across the NWE programme, regardless the type of territory. The programme aims at making all regions in NWE more resilient, in the sense of increasing their ability to respond better to any existing and future challenge. Eventually, the programme wants to contribute to improving the quality of life and well-being of all NWE citizens.

Stakeholders from all types of territories (non-exclusive list), including urban, rural, coastal, hinterland regions, border territories, metropolitan areas, peri-urban areas, inner cities, urban neighbourhoods with risks of exclusion, suburbs, medium-sized towns, rural villages, and territories with specific needs will be invited to develop and implement place-based solutions.

The thematic scope of the programme covers aspects of the green, smart and just transition with the aim to support a balanced development and territorial resilience.

Priority 1-Smart climate and environmental resilience for NWE territories refers to Policy objective 2 'A Greener, low-carbon Europe'. It aims to improve the climate resilience and environmental quality of communities and regions by relying on the high potential of the area.

Combating climate change represents one of the main territorial challenges for the cooperation area. The Programme shall contribute to the objective of the European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640 final) to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It also feeds into the Sustainable Development Goal 13 "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact". Despite differences between urban, rural and coastal areas, the NWE area is one of the most economically developed in the EU, with a high density of population and infrastructures (incl. transport) as well as industries. Energy consumption and GHG emissions are very high, contributing to a significant exposure of territories and communities to climate change related risks and threats to nature and ecosystemic services.

Priority 2 – Smart and just energy transition for NWE territories refers to Policy objective 2 'A Greener, low-carbon Europe'. It aims to promote a smart and just energy transition in the NWE area.

The NWE territories are committed to contributing to the ambitious goals of the European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640 final). It will enable Europe to be the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 by prioritising energy efficiency, developing a power sector largely based on renewable resources, securing an affordable EU energy supply and striving for a fully integrated, interconnected digitised EU energy market. The contribution of the NWE Programme is also in line with the Sustainable Development Goals 7 "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" and 12 "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns". Although the NWE regions show stable partnerships, networks and new institutions supporting this transition, there are still shortcomings. There are several needs to develop the energy demand and supply compatibility, as well as to promote appropriate multi-level governance systems which take into account many dimensions involved in the process towards a low carbon economy.

Priority 3- Transition towards a place-based circular economy refers to Policy objective 2 ‘A Greener, low-carbon Europe’.

In comparison to the whole of the EU, the NWE area is relatively advanced when it comes to adopting approaches for a resource-efficient circular economy, but further advancements should be made. In particular, the benefits of the transition are not evenly distributed across all territories, industrial sectors and societal groups.

Priority 4 – Improving territorial resilience in NWE through innovative and smart transformation-refers to Policy objective 1 “a more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity”.

Although the NWE area is leading in many sectors, disparities relating to innovation capacities, the use of technologies and the deployment of digitalisation can be observed in the different NWE territories and economies. Furthermore the COVID crisis and its aftermath, the impact of Brexit and globalisation have emphasised the need to support public and private innovation players in NWE (SMEs, business support organisations, clusters, representative chambers of professionals/sectors, local, regional and national authorities, public infrastructure providers, research and technology organisations, (public) service providers, citizen associations etc.). In this context, innovation and the support to public and private innovation players shall be an enabler for economic and territorial development. Innovation capacities are needed to support the transformation of economies towards future-proof business development as well as for tackling territorial challenges and boost smart and integrated development. Innovative capacities ranging from private to public sectors are crucial for the balanced territorial development of all regions.

Priority 5 – Inclusive NWE - refers to Policy objective 4 “a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights” to promote inclusive growth and a balanced integrated territorial development. It aims to improve NWE communities’ capacities, skills and well-being by providing services of general interest and the right conditions for reinforcing quality employment, access to health and care, and to enhance the potential of tourism and culture in economic development.

One of the territorial challenges of the NWE area is to overcome territorial disparities with regard to social and societal development, integration and equal access to public services. With this priority the Programme shall contribute to following some of the 17 “sustainable development goals” (SDGs) of the United Nations : SDG 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong

learning opportunities for all”, SDG 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, SDG 10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries”, SDG 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, SDG 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

During the implementation, the Programme will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement services.

Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities, joint investment needs

The analysis of joint challenges is based on a thorough territorial analysis. In order to summarise the most pressing joint challenges in the NWE area, challenges have been classified according to three different territorial profiles: urban areas, areas with dominant urban-rural linkages and rural areas. However, it is clear that the differentiation of challenges is not always clear-cut or can vary for certain territories. Some challenges refer to all or various profiles of territories. The following paragraphs present the main challenges and their consequences according to the types of territories that are most affected.

North-West Europe is one of Europe’s most urbanised and densely populated areas. It is also among the most productive and wealthy areas with a high concentration/degree of innovation activities and high levels of digital and transport connectivity. At the same time, territorial challenges and disparities between territories persist. When looking more specifically into the overall high level of economic wealth, the pattern at the local level shows that is not evenly distributed across the cooperation area. For instance, GDP per capita is much higher in capital cities, towns and urban areas than in most rural regions of the NWE area. Simultaneously, some rural territories have high rates of employment, alongside certain urban neighbourhoods struggling with unemployment and social exclusion. Overall, the high level of industrialisation and productivity in NWE comes at a price. Negative environmental effects on air quality, greenhouse gas emission levels as well as water quality make the adaptation to climate change effects even more pressing. Achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 will require a transformation that goes beyond focusing on the financial, regulatory and technological shifts and places citizens and communities at the heart of the transition. To achieve the so-called just transition is therefore a common challenge for all NWE territories. The strategy of the NWE

programme addresses the territorial challenges of the different NWE territories and focuses on place-based solutions developed in a transnational format. Specific challenges are similar across the NWE area with complementary characteristics. The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats has allowed to identify joint investment needs across the area that would benefit from territorial action and cooperation.

A) Main joint challenges in urban areas in NWE

North-West Europe is a predominately urbanised region, home to the biggest urban areas of the European Union. Large parts of the NWE area region is part of the so-called ‘European blue banana’, comprising a set of metropolitan agglomerations such as Brussels, Amsterdam, the Rhine/Ruhr area or Paris, many urban, peri-urban and rural areas as well as coastal and hinterland areas (mainly in Ireland, Belgium, France and Germany). The weight of the urban areas is even more pronounced as the NWE cooperation area comprises many of the economically strongest EU cities, with different gateway functions and characteristics and challenges. Many small and medium-sized cities and towns represent the territorial backbone of the NWE area. Due to a high degree of urbanisation, challenges and opportunities for urban development are critical for the development of the NWE cooperation area. This matters for all types of cities and urban areas in North-West Europe.

Territorial challenge A.1: Combating environmental degradation and the harmful effects of climate change

The territorial analysis carried out in preparation of this programme has shown that many territories suffer from the negative effects of environmental degradation and have a severe exposure to climate change effects such as heat stress, flooding, droughts, and impacts of extreme weather and climate related events leading to negative effects on people and biodiversity.

Between 1980 and 2017 extreme weather and climate related events have induced considerable economic impacts in NWE cooperation area countries with an average loss per capita of almost EUR 1,000. Germany had the highest monetary loss with by far the highest number of fatalities, Luxembourg had the highest loss per capita and per square km. Recent extreme weather events have confirmed this trend.

Heat stress is another environmental challenge, amplified by climate change effects, affecting especially urban areas of the NWE cooperation area. The spatial distribution of heat stress is expected to have the highest impact in the German NWE regions and parts of Belgium. Highly urbanised regions, such as the Amsterdam and Brussels metropolitan areas, stand out with particularly high impacts compared to their neighbouring regions.

In many areas of NWE, air quality is poor and pollution is high, be it from transport emissions, industry or agriculture. Many urban areas perform low on NOx, PM2.5 and SO2 emissions, while others have a worrying performance of NH3 and NMVOC, because of transportation and industrial emissions. Curbing greenhouse gas emissions continues to be challenging for all types of urban areas.

The large majority of NWE water bodies are not in a good ecological state, and have the potential for further degradation. The main significant pressures on surface water bodies are diffuse sources and atmospheric deposition, followed by hydro-morphological pressures (e.g. through dams, locks, physical alteration of channels), urban wastewater treatment and abstraction (e.g. from industry, water supply). In many places, blue infrastructure (i.e. water elements, like rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, floodplains) is lacking or of poor quality. In some areas, a significant amount of surface water bodies show clear signs of chemical pollution. While the status of groundwater across NWE is generally good, it is under significant pressure in some areas.

NWE has a relatively low density of green infrastructure (i.e. trees, lawns, hedgerows, parks, fields, forests, gardens and green areas connecting natural and protected areas). Land-use is intense and natural ecosystems are fragmented. This affects the quality and quantity of biodiversity especially in urban regions, affected also by other factors such as invasive species, lack of green spaces, or lack of water. At the same time, there is an important unexploited potential for the maintenance of existing green infrastructure, the improvement of connectivity between protected areas and the restoration of natural and semi-natural areas.

With regard to the circular economy, physical waste intensity in NWE is high compared to EU averages. Large parts of the NWE cooperation area have improved its rates for recycling, toxic waste or landfills. However, caution is required as an increase in incineration capacity has been observed. Luxembourg, Germany and Ireland are lagging behind with regards to the circular (re)use rate of secondary materials. Circular business strategies and models are responsible in the NWE area for EUR 2,857 employed persons per 1 million inhabitants, above EU average. However, the territorial distribution is not equal since the diffusion of circular business models is favoured by agglomerations (both industrial and urban) and knowledge hubs. Overall, there is still a large potential to promote circularity at the local level and across different value chains to reduce the amount of resources that have a short life ending up in landfills and to improve the reuse and efficiency of materials in production.

Energy intensity measures the energy needs of an economy and is often used as an approximation of energy efficiency. In NWE, the level of energy intensity is the highest in Belgium, moderate in France, Germany and the Netherlands, and the lowest in Ireland and Luxembourg.

All Member States in the NWE cooperation area are committed to achieving a significant reduction in energy consumption, mainly through decoupling economic growth from energy consumption with higher energy efficiency. The decoupling may result from reducing the demand for energy-intensive services (e.g. heating, lighting) by using energy in a more efficient way (thereby using less energy per unit of economic output). High investment needs and gaps mainly concern energy efficiency in buildings.

When it comes to the share of energy from renewable sources in the field of electricity, there is a significant gap in some NWE countries. In 2018, the EU-27 average was 32%. The analysis of the NWE countries reveals that more than one-third of all electricity consumed was generated from renewable sources in Germany, while the share of energy from renewable sources in electricity is lower in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Overall, there is a large potential to use renewable energy sources or efficient technologies for heating and electricity generation. Important solar energy potential exists in many NWE areas. For example, in Luxembourg, around 3% of households have installed residential solar photovoltaic, while the technical potential for such activities is 8%.

Potential joint investment needs for cooperation in urban areas:

- Working on solutions based on renewable energy sources and techniques and energy efficiency measures (materials, technologies, digitalisation, skills of building professionals, etc.), energy efficiency support mechanisms (e.g. financing, procurement, etc.) and solutions for the cogeneration of heat and power (CHP) and consumer engagement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Developing and implementing strategies relating to the circular economy, waste and resource efficiency, notably the reduction of waste generation per capita, the improvement of the waste recycling rate, and measures to improve the circular material use rate.
- Developing joint strategies to better prevent and adapt to the effects of climate change or mitigate adverse climate or severe weather phenomena.
- Improving the potential of green infrastructure and the status of natural capital and biodiversity.
- Raising awareness and social acceptance of new efficient and circular approaches, engaging communities and supporting a mindset shift towards more consistent and sustainable approaches.
- Improving the availability of good quality water in surface water bodies and/or groundwater sources.

Territorial challenge A.2: Fighting fragmentation and urban poverty

Urban socio-economic development is not equal for all NWE urban areas. Socio-economic disparities tend to increase. There is a need to address these trends by adjusting and transferring solutions from regions more successfully combatting this trend with similar socio-economic and demographic structures. In addition, territorial differences in postindustrial resilience and innovation capacity are present. Hence, despite the economic supremacy of urban areas, many of them face multiple challenges relevant for further policy development. Furthermore, cooperation is useful to address these challenges not only between urban areas and the surroundings, but also across larger territories.

A specific facet of poverty in urban areas relates to so-called energy poverty. It describes difficulties of low-income households to pay their energy bills or suffer from a lack of adequate energy services at home. This is often generated by low energy performance in buildings, which is a common challenge to almost all urban areas of NWE. There is a threat that energy efficiency measures, such as retrofitting houses in urban areas might negatively affect low-income households, with higher energy costs or higher rents. Indirect effects on social exclusion or availability of affordable housing need to be considered.

Challenges facing urban areas can be diverse and cover many aspects of territorial development. These are mainly related to social inclusion and quality of life including health, but also mobility, poverty, waste management in a circular economy, education and knowledge promotion, sustainable efficient and green energy production, networks that promote participatory democratic processes and citizen involvement and empowerment. Unequal promotion of these aspects can increase existing inequalities and lead to social fragmentation.

Potential joint investment needs for cooperation in urban areas:

- Strengthening mutual learning and solutions to reduce urban poverty, improve efficient and smart mobility and sustainable and efficient energy without threatening the availability of affordable housing, promote and implement circular economy plans at a metropolitan scale.
- Enhancing cooperation between smaller cities, second tier cities and towns to create a competitive critical mass for the provision of services of general interest.
- Supporting urban areas with low social performance by promoting integrated approaches, cross-sectoral coordination, and the involvement of local stakeholders to provide basic services.
- Mitigating the risk of social exclusion in urban areas and capitalising on their high economic opportunities (employment opportunities, infrastructures, services, transport, etc.).
- Transforming towns and cities into more attractive places to live, work and visit through transnational strategies.

- Empowering local communities to elaborate local development strategies for addressing urban poverty and inclusion.
- Involving local stakeholders to address challenges stemming from a growing population in cities and in the densely populated metropolitan agglomerations.

B) Main joint challenges in territories in NWE with dense urban-rural linkages

The urban pattern in North-West Europe is fostered by many second-tier cities in all territories from predominantly urban to rural. Urban-rural relations and linkages are natural and inevitable. Flows of people, visitors and goods integrate urban and rural areas in functional and spatial patterns. They enhance existing complementarities between urban and rural regions and can improve access to services and increase the economic attractiveness of rural areas. Different types of urban-rural linkages can be seen, e.g. rural-urban migration and commuting, economic transactions, delivery of public services, including public transport, and ecosystem services, such as leisure, recreation, water, energy and food supplies.

In addition, different functional areas can be observed in the NWE cooperation area, e.g. functional urban areas, functional rural areas, urban-rural partnerships. Functionalities can be found in transport related links, as for example in the flows of people and goods. These include high speed connections but also conventional rail, road connections, transnational cycling routes (e.g. Eurovelo), air, waterways and port connections. Rural-urban and cross-border commuter flows are relevant functional linkages in many NWE urban-rural regions, as parts of the NWE. Functionalities also play an important role when it comes to urban-rural linkages, as the latter contribute to integrate rural and urban areas into more functional territories and improve access to basic services within functional areas, increase the attractiveness of rural areas, enhance complementarities and inspire more balanced territorial development.

The region has a rich experience with cross-border functional areas, most of them are already in the focus of cross-border INTERREG programmes or cross-border EGTC. However, functional areas are not limited to cross-border areas. In many areas urban-rural divides persist. Such divides are mainly observed when it comes to GDP and economic activities, green infrastructure, transport connections and digital and physical accessibility of basic services, which highlight existing disparities between urban and rural regions and in functional areas. Territorial challenges remain when it comes to increasing the attractiveness and service capacity of functional areas facing a positive population development, with a need for adequate education and innovation facilities, smart energy systems, the transition to a circular economy, as well as accessibility and access to basic services.

Territorial challenge B.1: Fragmentation of innovation capacities

Innovation development largely differs between urban and rural regions with generally more limited innovation capacities in peri-urban or rural regions. However, even if urban areas seem to host knowledge hubs and technological leaders, some of them lag behind in the deployment of digital services, in the level of innovation and in the use of technologies and IT tools to tackle territorial and societal challenges. Building critical mass and innovation capacities in rural areas remains challenging. New technology development, digitisation, innovation in public administration and use of digital technologies and tools in service provision as well as IT deployment are relevant challenges, highlighting the disparities between urban and rural areas and urging the need for balancing innovation capacities across the area.

Potential transnational contribution to joint investment needs through urban-rural cooperation

- Enhancing innovation capacities between innovation leaders and regions ranked lower on the EU innovation scoreboard or who have lost their positions in recent years.
- Diffusing innovation from places where digital technology and smart approaches are developed to where it can bring an added value to economic, social or environmental development.
- Developing functional urban-rural areas to create a critical mass of innovation capacities e.g. on topics like commuting, innovation, education, tourism or basic services.
- Transferring innovative services and technologies from knowledge hubs to more remote areas.
- Building on similarities of objectives and approaches to territorial innovation across the regions, for example in Smart Specialisation Strategies.
- Scaling-up the potential of the social economy through promoting its contribution to the regional and transnational innovation capacities that can contribute to social impact and to a just transition and resilience.
- Jointly developing economic recovery strategies in view of the COVID-19 crisis in regions with similar economic profiles.

Territorial challenge B.2: Disintegrated green and blue infrastructure and ecosystem services

The sustainable transition is challenging for regions with important urban-rural linkages. Rural areas are fundamental for the provision of food, water, air, natural capital and other ecosystem services to urban areas. However, the pressure on rural areas, in particular in very densely populated countries, through intensive agriculture, extensive housing projects, extreme weather phenomena and a changing climate is increasing. Nine functional urban-rural areas in NWE have the highest urban flood risk, mainly those around the river catchment areas with clusters of high or very high risk found e.g. along the course of the Scheldt in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the Moselle in Luxembourg, France and Germany, in the areas of Cork and Waterford in Ireland, and the regions along the Rhine from south-western Germany to the

Netherlands. Nature and nature-based solutions are key to guaranteeing a minimum of natural capital, to reduce negative effects of natural events and to maintain biodiversity in any given region. Green and blue infrastructure in most regions of the NWE area is relatively low in EU comparison. There is a high risk of deteriorating the existing green and blue infrastructure in NWE, in particular in areas around larger cities. Green and blue spaces are not only sparse in core cities but in outer parts of urban areas of several regions of the NWE cooperation area. Improving green and blue infrastructure in the NWE area seems necessary for NEW.

Potential transnational contribution to joint investment needs through urban-rural cooperation

- Supporting economic, social and energy restructuring.
- Promoting community engagement and alternative business opportunities to maintain or increase regional employment towards climate change mitigation, circular economy, renewable energies etc.
- Developing alternative business models (e.g. with benefits for local communities) to tackle long-term societal challenges.
- Maintaining existing blue and green infrastructures, improving connectivity between protected areas and restoring natural and semi-natural areas.
- Embedding of the green infrastructure concept into spatial planning policies.

Territorial challenge B.3: Provision of services in the context of urban-rural discontinuities

Availability, accessibility and affordability of basic services like telecommunication, health, education, childcare is an indicator for citizens' well-being and is increasingly important, given also the current COVID-19 crisis. Access to SGIs shows an urban-rural divide in the NWE cooperation area. Together with demographic effects, particularly in rural areas, this challenge increases. Travel times to and operational arrangements (e.g. opening hours) of childcare centres, secondary schools, healthcare providers, or hospitals vary heavily. Smart approaches and new solutions exploiting e.g. digital solutions, can improve the accessibility to education, childcare or healthcare services in peripheral areas as part of the quality of life and resilience of the territories.

Potential transnational contribution to joint investment needs through urban-rural cooperation

- Offsetting the mismatch between supply and demand of services, between rural and urban areas, taking into account the different demographic patterns and trends.
- Facilitating the transfer of digital technologies and tools in education, training, health and care services between urban and rural areas.
- Facilitating the transition to digital, innovative and technological transformation between urban and rural areas.

- Implementing rural-urban partnerships to implement integrated strategies in service provision.

C) Main joint challenges in rural/coastal areas and inner peripheries of NWE

The NWE cooperation area, despite being a highly urbanised area, is also home to rural and coastal areas as well as other areas with geographic specificities, but also inner peripheries. These territories allow for specialisation in some activities, adequate for smaller workforces than urban areas. Although larger cities have a higher productivity compared to smaller cities or rural areas, in NWE the latter often concentrate in agricultural production or the exploitation of natural resources, and manufacturing, which, given the small workforce and population, leads to specialisation in specific activities.

Depopulation, unemployment, GDP differences with urban areas and lack of accessibility challenge economic development in the rural areas. The more remote rural and coastal areas are, the more vulnerable they are to unfavourable demographic developments. Peripheral rural areas often face a lower access to digital infrastructure and high-speed Internet which hampers the development of many business activities, digital solutions in education and health or other uses of digital tools. Overall, access to basic services is considerably more limited in peripheral rural areas than in urban areas or urban-rural territories. Some rural areas suffer from depopulation, ageing, low availability of trained workers, low population density and critical mass of population affecting the provision of services.

Rural zones have high-potential cultural and natural heritage assets. They are increasingly preferred destinations for domestic tourism and short-term excursions, putting pressure on biodiversity and natural/cultural heritage. At the same time, rural areas are severely affected by weather phenomena and climate effects such as heavy rain or storms, droughts, forest dieback/fires or reduced groundwater levels.

When it comes to coastal areas, their location and character play a decisive role in their development. At the same time, coastal areas that are home to large cities and urban areas show a different picture of development, as they can be attractive poles for development or be economic hotspots within their national contexts. Economic activities are also quite diverse in coastal areas, these can e.g. be port activities, fisheries and sea-related tourism. Ecosystems and climate are also very different across the coastal areas, dependent on different geomorphological characteristics and climate zones across Europe. Accessibility to coastal areas depends on the remoteness and national population distribution.

Overall, a number of challenges persist mostly for peripheral rural and coastal areas. Given their geographic particularities, which are a challenge per se, they could possibly be turned into comparative advantages through integrated strategies and enhanced cooperation.

Territorial challenge C.1: Barriers on the way to a just sustainable transition

The digital rural divide often hampers the development and use of digital tools and solutions. Economic and employment opportunities are few and lack diversity in rural areas. Activities related to culture and tourism offer new opportunities for jobs and income that have not yet been fully exploited in many areas but might also bring new challenges such as increased flows of transport and goods, waste, and pressure on natural protected areas. Farming still plays an important role in employment and income generation. However, the intensification of farming (and fishing) adds to the trends of depopulation, pollution and biodiversity challenges. All this has increased the environmental challenges in rural areas.

Potential transnational contribution to joint investment needs through cooperation at different levels

- Addressing rural demographic challenges focusing on job opportunities and attractive living conditions.
- Creating attractive employment opportunities, e.g. by addressing workers' skills in rural areas with lower labour market participation rates.
- Enhancing the provision of SGI addressing the shortage of public services in some areas, which may also impact positively on labour market opportunities.
- Supporting social innovation, citizen empowerment or exploiting the potential of digital tools and applications for a better quality of life.
- Strengthening territorial health/well-being/care networks which can best recognise the needs of their territories and develop adequate solutions.

Territorial challenge C.2: Ageing, depopulation and quality of life

Counterbalancing the location challenges and building on comparative advantages of the rural territories is a challenge in itself. Green and blue infrastructure, established ecosystems, wind, solar and biomass as renewable resources, as well as cultural and natural heritage offer large development opportunities to rural and coastal areas. What is challenging is to find solutions to build on those comparative advantages and turn them into assets. This potential needs to be seen in the context of general challenges, as described earlier, such as brain drain, ageing, depopulation etc.

At the same time, coastal areas with prominent towns and cities show a different pattern of development. Coasts are attractive poles for urban development and most populated cities tend

to develop on the shoreline. Some coastal regions are economic hotspots within their national contexts while others lag behind economically. This variety is further broadened by the diversity of economic activities in coastal areas. Status of ecosystems, climate and climate change risks, accessibility and remoteness differ strongly between the coastal areas of the NWE cooperation area. This demands place-based solutions to the specific challenges and opportunities of coastal areas.

Potential transnational contribution to joint investment needs through cooperation at different levels

- Increasing sustainable tourism in rural areas
- Strengthening the local identity of rural areas, to address e.g. depopulation and brain drain.
- Building new sustainable business models on a responsible exploitation of cultural and natural heritage.
- Supporting rural areas to become frontrunners in renewable energies or use of biomass, which may benefit from coordinated strategies in these fields and from the experience of other regions.
- Supporting community-led local development solutions for a better quality of life and provision of services.
- Strengthening renewable energy investments and supporting opportunities through joint strategies for coastal areas.
- Ensuring joint activities to a transition towards a green and circular economy to create employment in rural and peripheral areas.

Lessons learned from the past

The Interreg NWE Programme is now entering its sixth phase of programming. The new programme can therefore build on an existing vast amount of knowledge and expertise from the five previous funding periods. Experience and lessons learned have been collected and improvements have been made to operational aspects of the programme and to funded projects alike. Even though the thematic scope of the VB programme did not change throughout its course, the daily operations are in line with the findings of the implementation evaluation carried out in 2018 and the Territorial Analysis of NWE finalized in 2020 bringing the state-of-the-art statistical knowledge of the NWE territory.

In the previous VB programme, 102 projects were financed by NWE. The 2018 implementation evaluation showed that the 2014-2020 Programme had had an impact on territorial development

and filled a critical gap for transnational cooperation. The evaluation also demonstrated that the programme successfully complemented the domestic/national funding programmes of its Member States. The 102 funded projects contributed to the goals of territorial cohesion, competitiveness, and balanced development. Support from the NWE programme was well-distributed between poor and well-performing NUTS regions. The relative ESIF share per type of region showed that the NWE funding support was, however, at the end of 2017, predominantly provided to urban and intermediate regions.

The VB programme has proven its contribution to all three axes of sustainable development (environmental, economic and social), through the projects implemented under all five thematic specific objectives.

1. Social, through

- a) Inclusive growth and improvement in quality of life (good health and well-being, to the benefit of the population and health-care professionals, promotion of more affordable, accessible, effective and empowering mental health by e-product innovation, improvement in the care process of heart failure treatment and musculoskeletal system/neurodisability, development and valorization of 3D smart implants for bone fractures, etc).
- b) Food security and sustainable agriculture practice (boosting the competitiveness of dairy farms, increasing product quality and economic prosperity of farmers).
- c) Reduction of inequalities (entrepreneurial education and personalized coaching for people not in education, employment or training, establishment of social entrepreneurship hubs, access to more affordable energy and housing, large scale retrofitting projects for households, provision of affordable warmth, development of renewable energy community cooperatives, etc).

2. Environmental:

- a) Improved air quality (zero emission heavy duty vehicles - hydrogen trucks, combustion engines in urban freight transport, facilitating modal shift from road to waterways, introduction of healthy mobility infrastructures (bicycle highways), cross-cutting GHG emission reduction across three Programme Specific Objectives).
- b) Clean energy, sustainable energy use and management, amongst others: demonstration of ocean capacity for energy generation, addressing poorly connected and remote areas, strongly dependent on non-renewable energy sources, use of deep geothermal energy for district heating networks, replacement of diesel generators, hydrogen-based energy models, hybrid energy systems addressing energy remoteness (areas not connected to the main energy infrastructure).

c) Sustainable production patterns (circular construction and renovation, resource efficiency, waste prevention and reduction, the application of environmental technologies (all projects of SO dedicated to circular economy)).

3. Economic growth and attractiveness - job creation and maintenance, enhanced economic competitiveness of SMEs, improvement of enterprise environment/eco-system (projects of four out of five programme Specific Objectives).

During the VB programme implementation, there was a tendency to value projects contributing to competitiveness and growth as more effective and successful, since their contributions were easier to quantify. A lack of available quantitative data and indicators at local and regional levels for social inclusion, cohesion, environmental and efficiency-related performance hampered the development and approval of projects targeting balanced development. This should be improved in the 2021-2027 period.

The 2020 territorial analysis has generated differentiated information on the territorial state of art of NWE. It covered a stakeholder analysis of all partners in 2014-2020 Interreg NWE projects to learn from the participation of the past funding period. This knowledge will be used to develop targeted calls in the upcoming funding period. In the programming phase a stakeholder consultation took place to learn even more about concrete expectations and fields of interest of relevant NWE stakeholders. The analysis identified many thematic areas and joint investment needs with potential for transnational cooperation. The summary of joint needs is presented above. The analysis also provided insight into the specific challenges for cooperation in the 2021-2027 period and in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Stakeholders agreed that transnational cooperation programmes are more needed than ever, focussing on activities like policy learning, developing tools, feasibility studies, testing, pilots and exchange of experience. Taking into account that other EU and national funding sources under the Next Generation EU framework will be available for relevant 'hard' (investment) projects, Interreg NWE should concentrate rather on the 'soft' actions such as testing, pilot actions, transformative innovation or living labs. To strengthen the 'territorial dimension' of transnational cooperation, the following may be considered: - all selected POs and SOs may use territorial disparities in the NWE cooperation area as a starting point for action to avoid increasing regional disparities; - cooperation potential can be based on both differences and similarities of partners that face common challenges. These can then, for instance, be addressed jointly or by transferring successful solutions; - strengthening the territorial dimension may imply a stronger involvement of public authorities and other groups representing public and citizen interests. This will bring transnational cooperation closer to the citizen but may require a change in the understanding, for instance, of the nature of 'innovation' projects, especially when aiming to reduce territorial disparities.

One opportunity to build on past project results is capitalisation. In the framework of its capitalisation strategy 2014-2020, the NWE programme developed various tools and activities aiming to maximise the impact of project results achieved up to now. The objective was to give extra support to projects whose results showed a particularly strong potential to be rolled-out or taken up beyond what was initially planned (towards new areas, new sectors, new type of stakeholders). It was also a way to support the unforeseen benefits that often emerge during the lifetime of a project and that deserve further attention and support. Among the different capitalisation initiatives aiming to support these project results, the NWE programme organised two calls for capitalisation, open to approved projects. 33 projects benefited from extra funding to develop capitalisation activities and this opportunity gave partnerships a clear boost in terms of project impact and visibility.

Complementarities and synergies with other forms of support

The Interreg NWE Programme as well as many other EU Programmes have created multiple solutions tackling local and regional challenges during previous programming periods. However, synergies with other EU Programmes, especially for actions implemented in the Interreg NWE Programme area, are often not effectively exploited. In the context of the territorial analysis 2020, the NWE programme has identified complementarities and potential synergies with other programmes and forms of support for the 2021-2027 period. The following areas were defined as highly relevant to be taken into account:

- Complementarities to other EU instruments and policies: Horizon Europe with a focus on excellent mission-oriented research can be complementary to NWE projects with its focus on cohesion. The Digital Europe programme 2021-2027 aims at ensuring digitisation and advanced digital skills and can be complementary to NWE cooperation projects that will have a clear territorial focus. In particular, the Digital Innovation Hubs can be accompanied by relevant NWE projects in 2021-2027. In the field of SME support, the Single Market Programme 2021-2027, the InvestEU Fund, can offer synergies to NWE projects. The new ERASMUS+ Programme will be complementary on education and training topics. In specific thematic areas the new LIFE+ programme and EUHealth can offer potential for synergies, for example, on energy efficiency, renewable energy or health systems.

- Complementarities to the regional and national programmes under the Investment for Jobs and Growth (IJ&G) goal: mainstream national and regional ERDF and ESF+ programmes will complement many aspects of the NWE Programme. ERDF projects with a regional/national focus can create complementary infrastructure, structures and settings for effective transnational cooperation projects, while ESF+ programmes support social and employment-related

measures, training and capacity-building. Complementarities can be expected in certain territories with projects under other instruments such as PeacePlus, JTF, EMAFF or EAFRD (through LEADER).

- Complementarities to other Interreg programmes: other cross-border and transnational Interreg Programmes in the NWE countries might offer comparable opportunities to stakeholders in the fields of green transition, innovation and inclusion in particular the North Sea Programme offers similarities and complementarities.

- The provision of territorial data on recent European development trends can inform the development of Interreg NWE projects and Interreg NWE programme activities. At the same time additional knowledge demand arising from Interreg NWE cooperation might be addressed through targeted analysis by the ESPON programme.

- Complementarities to the Territorial Agenda (TA) 2030: the NWE programme will be contributing to the TA 2030 which provides a framework for action towards territorial cohesion and a future for all places in Europe. Learning from the TA2030 pilot actions that started in 2020 can be an inspiration for NWE projects.

- Complementarity to the Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument: the new EU instrument for Interregional Innovation Investments might offer follow up activities through partnerships with stakeholders from outside NWE and with a clear investment component.

- Complementarities to Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3): the NWE programme offers opportunities for regions and countries to increase transnational cooperation and enhance critical mass related to territorial innovation and resilience based on the specific smart specialisation strategies. Through the programme, NWE territories and all stakeholders can work together on common fields of interests defined in the relevant S3.

DRAFT

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

Table 1

Selected PO or ISO	Selected SO	Priority	Justification for selection (2000 per objective)
PO2	2.4	1	<p><i>With SO 2.4 the programme expects to contribute to making the NWE communities more resilient and able to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change in the long term. Large territories within the NWE area are concerned by high heat proneness. Natural spaces replaced by built surfaces make them especially vulnerable to high temperatures and heat absorption. Rising temperatures resulting from climate change tend to aggravate heat stress, exposing NWE to greater local climate variability and negatively affecting human health and safety. The need identified by the territorial analysis is to reduce heat stress and, consequently, to enable exposed regions to better adapt to climate change. Concerning the reduction of air pollution, the territorial analysis outlined that most NWE regions are failing to meet air quality targets. The worsening of air pollution in the NWE area calls for mitigation and/or adaptation measures to reduce its manifold risks, such as the adverse consequences on health.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, the NWE area faces significant challenges both in terms of water quality and availability. The large majority of water bodies in the NWE area are not in good chemical and ecological status. The NWE area is relatively rich in annual renewable freshwater resources. However, water management is problematic due to the increase in the frequency of severely dry and wet periods caused by climate change.</i></p> <p><i>The Programme shall contribute to the objective of the European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640 final) to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It also feeds into the Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action.</i></p>
PO2	2.7	1	<p><i>SO 2.7 wants to improve conditions of biodiversity recovery/protection by increasing the capacity of communities to maintain and enhance green/blue infrastructure and ecosystem services in the NWE regions. Combating environmental degradation as well as preserving biodiversity also represent one of the main territorial challenges for the cooperation area. The potential for additional green and blue infrastructure and protected areas in most regions of the NWE cooperation area is relatively low compared to the EU average, due to intense land use and fragmented natural ecosystems. As a consequence, the maintenance of existing green/blue infrastructure, the improvement of connectivity between protected areas and the restoration of natural and semi-natural areas is particularly important. This context calls for more efforts to develop green/blue infrastructure which ensures the protection or restoration of a wide range of ecosystems and prevents the loss of biodiversity and natural capital. Climate change and biodiversity are indeed interconnected in the sense that, when biodiversity is threatened by climate change, the capacity of ecosystems to deliver essential services is also under stress, generating negative consequences. In light of these interdependencies, therefore, an integrated approach to protect biodiversity and ecosystems and</i></p>

			<p><i>mitigating the effects of climate change via green/blue infrastructure is needed.</i></p> <p><i>The programme will contribute to increasing the capacity of communities to maintaining and enhancing green/blue infrastructure and ecosystemic services.</i></p> <p><i>The Programme shall contribute to the European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640 final. It also feeds into the Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action.</i></p>
PO2	2.1	2	<p><i>SO 2.1 aims to increase the capacity of NWE communities to exploit potential for improving energy efficiency by identifying opportunities that increase the energy performance.</i></p> <p><i>The EU has formulated a binding target to increase energy efficiency (Directive (EU) 2018/2002 2018) and to reduce GHG emissions to at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. The NWE area takes part to this overall effort.</i></p> <p><i>According to the territorial analysis, there are various fields of intervention with high potential for improving the overall energy efficiency of the NWE area. Energy performance in buildings and in transports is still low in many programme areas. Similarly, the effectiveness of new energy storage systems is still hampered by the lack of cost-effective technologies and of harmonised grid solutions and financing schemes. Furthermore, despite the potential of the NWE area in terms of digital infrastructure and services (from the distribution grid to the retail market) the deployment of decentralised energy production and/or smart energy systems (smart grids and smart meters) is still low.</i></p> <p><i>The SO also feeds into the Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy.</i></p>
PO2	2.2	2	<p><i>SO 2.2 aims to contribute to increasing the capacity of NWE communities to exploit the potential to improve renewable energy production and consumption mix.</i></p> <p><i>The EU has formulated a binding target to increase the use of energy from renewable sources (Directive (EU) 2018/2001). The NWE area is one of the highest energy-consuming regions in the EU. Most of the NWE countries are on track with the achievement of EU specific targets for Renewable Energy Sources (RES) deployment. There is, however, a significant unexploited potential for improving the renewable energy production and consumption mix. On the one hand, many regions in the area are still affected by fossil-based dependency, on the other, the potential for increasing the energy production from renewable sources and techniques is still high in many NWE areas (in particular, in solar, biomass, hydro, geothermic/ heat pump, hydrogen and wind energy). However, the deployment of RES is limited by a lack of certainty regarding future investments in some countries, and also by the persistence of legal barriers such as e.g. the extended time to issue permits (particularly for wind power). The SO also feeds into the Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy.</i></p>
PO2	2.6	3	<p><i>Priority 3 (SO 2.6) aims to promote a more effective transition towards circular economy by giving access to its benefits to all.</i></p>

			<p>The territorial analysis shows that the NWE area is rather advanced when it comes to adopting approaches for a resource-efficient circular economy. Most regions of the NWE cooperation area have a relatively low material consumption per capita despite their high economic performance. However, renewed efforts are constantly needed to reach higher targets in terms of waste management. Activities to transition to a more circular economy need further improvement, as the benefits of the transition are not evenly distributed across the different territories, industrial sectors and societal groups.</p> <p>This priority contributes to the EU Circular Economy Action Plan 'For a cleaner and more competitive Europe' (2020) as well as to multiple UN SDGs, including SDGs 8 on economic growth, 11 on sustainable cities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate change, 14 on oceans, and 15 on life on land.</p>
PO1	1.1	4	<p>Priority 4 (SO 1.1) addresses the need to tackle innovation capacities imbalances in an integrated way by implementing strategies and using innovation capacities including the uptake of digital and (advanced) technologies, tools and solutions. The aim is to implement strategies to link regions with specific economic sectors/ value chains / strategies with similar challenges in NWE and to harness the potential of innovation and smart approaches to develop cooperation partnerships involving public and private actors, as well as knowledge institutes and civil society.</p> <p>In particular, joint integrated action is welcome for NWE public and private innovation players needing to close their possible "innovation gaps" or adapt place-based innovative processes. Innovation gaps could be for example lack of knowledge in new technologies, digitalisation or access to data and services for citizens.</p>
PO4	4.1	5	<p>This Specific Objective 4.1 addresses NWE territorial imbalances in the field of labour market and employment, while also contributing to strengthening social and societal integration. The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area highlighted that rural regions, poor urban neighbourhoods and some industrialised areas show higher labour market disparities than other regions in NWE. Mismatches in the labour market and in the provision of public services are observed among the NWE countries but also within them. In rural areas youth unemployment remains high. However, lower participation in the labour market (i.e. economic activity rates) also exists in certain industrialised areas.</p> <p>The adverse but not yet fully known economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may heavily impact NWE "vulnerable" people, areas and labour markets. Yet, the vulnerability of individual sectors and labour markets may vary quite strongly across NWE regions, but particular attention shall be paid to the negative effects on vulnerable groups and/or on the verge of facing "fragility" (e.g. non-exhaustive list: disabled, unemployed (including long-term), young people, single parents, NEETs, people living in a rural, intermediate or urban area, migrants, refugees).</p>

			<i>This priority contributes to the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as to multiple UN SDGs, including SDGs 4 on quality education, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities.</i>
PO4	4.5	5	<p><i>This Specific Objective 4.5 addresses territorial imbalances and needs that exist in NWE with respect to health care access and the resilience of health systems. The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area showed that inhabitants of peripheral areas in NWE have generally more difficulties accessing healthcare services. This problem is aggravated by the observed decrease in hospital beds that has taken place in NWE over the last years. Generally, there is a need to further improve accessibility of healthcare and long-term care services in rural areas and particularly in the peripheral areas of NWE.</i></p> <p><i>Further population growth in the urban core areas of NWE may also overburden healthcare systems and affect their capacity to meet the future care demand effectively. Besides, demographic change and a further ageing of the population indicate an increasing need for innovative care services and new solutions in the health care systems of NWE.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the lack of resilience of healthcare systems in NWE regions as well as the strong interdependencies between countries and neighbouring border regions. This calls for better transnational cooperation to ensure sufficient provision of health care services to all NWE citizens.</i></p> <p><i>This priority contributes to the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as to multiple UN SDGs, including SDGs 4 on quality education, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities.</i></p>
PO4	4.6	5	<p><i>This Specific Objective 4.6 aims to enhance the role of culture and sustainable tourism in the economic development of NWE, social inclusion and social innovation.</i></p> <p><i>This sector was and still is severely affected by the negative consequences emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.</i></p> <p><i>The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area showed that rural and remote areas in NWE can use their competitive advantages (e.g. rich natural assets, “hidden gems” to alleviate highly frequented regions). Local tourism can help promote sustainable tourism (longer seasonality, eco-friendlier approaches, networking of local interdependent professionals) and contribute to halting depopulation and upskilling professionals.</i></p> <p><i>There are also potentials for developing innovative cultural projects and supporting creative and cultural industries, especially as elements to stimulate social and societal cohesion and inclusion, as well as to empower and regenerate “deprived” areas (whether urban, rural, intermediate or coastal areas).</i></p> <p><i>This priority contributes to the long-term vision of European regions for the tourism of tomorrow as well as to the UN SDGs 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities. 11 on sustainable cities and territories, and 12 on responsible consumption and production.</i></p>

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2. Priorities

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
(300 characters)

Smart climate and environmental resilience for NWE territories

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account ecosystem based approaches**

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

This specific objective is implemented with two foci: the first on the reduction of heat stress and air pollution, the second on water management.

Expected programme results

The programme expects to contribute to making the NWE communities more resilient and able to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change in the long term, aiming in particular to reduce the incidence of heat stress and of human activities on air quality, to reduce air pollution, to improve the preparedness to adverse weather phenomena (such as flooding and heavy rain events, drought etc.) and to reduce their negative effects. The programme expects to improve water management approaches in the NWE area and to address issues related to water quality and availability/quantity for the NWE surface and groundwater bodies. In particular, the programme aims to improve water quality and availability in the NWE territories, as well as shift to water management in line with climate change resilience, adaptation and mitigation and that prevents natural risks, including drought or heavy rain. The adoption of integrated measures can lead to significant improvements in the participating regions.

Heat stress and air pollution

To achieve these desired changes on this topic, the following results are expected:

- Key aspects of climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives with specific attention to heat stress and air pollution and the reduction or prevention of the severe negative effects of weather phenomena;
- Climate and environmental resilience, adaptation and mitigation are ensured through integrated place-based solutions and enhanced mobility and / or spatial planning processes;
- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders to translate climate change resilience, adaptation and mitigation into policies and actions (e.g. by systematically including climate variability as a key issue to consider during policy design and in the development of decision-making processes, as well as in the planning and adaptation of new and existing infrastructure);
- Innovative technologies, solutions, products and services that benefit regional climate change adaptation are taken up aiming to prevent or reduce heat stress and air pollution as well as the severe negative effects of weather phenomena, ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs;
- Citizens have better knowledge and capacity leading to their increased involvement and active role in climate and natural risks resilience.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities):

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, for example:

- Joint development, and implementation of strategies or action plans to implement adaptation and mitigation measures at local or regional level with the aim to reduce heat stress and air pollution in the NWE area.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and solutions in the field of climate change adaptation, mitigation and air quality, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of solutions at transnational scale for improving awareness and engagement on the air pollution related risks and boost behavioural change, incl. boost soft multimodal mobility;
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions for reducing heat stress and air pollution in a real-world environment;
- Demonstration and implementation of innovative measures to reduce heat stress by enhancing and installing green and blue infrastructure for adaptation.
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems to facilitate evidence-based decisions.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of climate change adaptation, mitigation and air quality, for example:

- Training schemes related to climate change resilience, adaptation and mitigation into decision-making processes and implementation actions.

Water management

To achieve the desired changes on water management, the following results are expected:

- Key aspects of climate resilience and adaptation are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives, with specific attention to improving water management in relation to quality and availability/quantity;
- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders to adopt innovative solutions concerning water management;
- Stronger stakeholder cooperation networks enabling the transfer of innovative approaches and/or the establishment of functional linkages in relation to water management;
- Establishment of long lasting place-based collaborations between decision makers, businesses, citizens and researchers to exploit the existing scientific and technological know-how and to disseminate solutions and collect reliable data for monitoring, managing, preventing and responding to natural and climate-related risks.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies or action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of strategies and action plans to improve the water availability and/or quality in surface and groundwater bodies.

b) Pilot actions for testing solutions and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable (technological) solutions for improving the ecological and chemical status of surface and groundwater bodies in the NWE area, specifically addressing diffuse and point sources of pollution;
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions (including blue and green infrastructure) for improving awareness on water issues and boost behavioural change (e.g. acceptance and reliance on water quality);
- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions for improving water quality and/or availability/quantity (e.g. adaptation of agricultural methods, water management, storage or retention, new land use concepts for prevention against drought or heavy rain, etc.);
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated monitoring systems or digital infrastructure, including data collection and the development of data-driven solutions to respond to water issues and flood risks to implement evidence-based decisions and pilots.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of climate change adaptation, mitigation and water quality / availability/quantity, for example:

- Training schemes related to water management, water quality, prevention against drought or heavy rain, etc.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
1	2.4	2.4.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*50=2,5 (rounded down to 2)	50
1	2.4	2.4.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*30=1,5 (rounded down to 1)	30
1	2.4	2.4.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*50=2,5 (rounded down to 2)	50

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	2.4	2.4.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	50	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
1	2.4	2.4.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	50	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
1	2.4	2.4.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	106	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters; 3700 approx)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to reducing heat stress, air pollution and/or to improve water management. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government/public organisations,

industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity with a legal status that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to rivers, environment, natural protection, public green, etc.

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes for the adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change, and drive change in certain policy fields, also for a more effective transition towards more resilient regions. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

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Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The research sector (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on climate change risks. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in developing climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their societal commitment for combating climate change.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of climate change adaptation and mitigation. By acting as multipliers to their networks they promote educational initiatives to raise awareness on climate change developments. They may help gather data and engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.4	058	11,384,283
1	ERDF	2.4	060	11,384,283
1	ERDF	2.4	064	11,384,283

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.4	01	34,152,850

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.4	33	34,152,850

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

(300 characters)

Smart climate and environmental resilience for NWE territories

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **2.7 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution.**

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

The potential for additional green and blue infrastructure and protected areas in most regions of the NWE cooperation area is relatively low compared to the EU average, due to intense land use and fragmented natural ecosystems. As a consequence, the maintenance of existing green/blue infrastructure, the improvement of connectivities between protected areas and the restoration of natural and semi-natural areas is particularly important. This context calls for more efforts to develop green/blue infrastructure which ensures the protection or restoration of a wide range of ecosystems and prevents the loss of biodiversity and natural capital.

Expected programme results

The programme wants to improve the conditions of biodiversity recovery/protection by increasing the capacity of communities to maintain and enhance green/blue infrastructure and ecosystem services in the NWE regions. The programme expects to contribute to embedding blue and green corridors, biodiversity and natural capital concepts in strategic ecosystem-based approaches and solutions. The programme intends to show the benefits of sound green/blue infrastructure not only to preserve biodiversity but also to combat climate change effects, e.g. with ecosystem based services.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key aspects of biodiversity preservation and green/blue infrastructure better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives;
- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders about green/blue infrastructure and biodiversity-enhancing / nature-friendly practices (through dissemination);
- Increased capacity of stakeholders to manage and maintain green/blue infrastructure and biodiversity through integrated territorial policies;
- Increased knowledge and skills on data management and new technologies in the field of biodiversity preservation and green/blue infrastructure;
- Innovative solutions that benefit biodiversity and the maintenance and enhancement of green/blue infrastructure taken up ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs;

- Stronger stakeholder cooperation networks enabling the transfer of innovative approaches and/or the establishment of functional linkages in relation to biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure among urban, rural, coastal and intermediate areas dealing with similar issues;
- Establishment of long lasting collaborations between policy makers, businesses, researchers and citizens contributing to the demonstration and testing of innovative solutions for protecting and enhancing natural heritage.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies or action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of coordinated nature management plans for measuring, maintaining, enhancing and valorising green/blue infrastructure, ecosystem services, biodiversity (e.g. invasive species).

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions to embed green infrastructure and ecosystem based-approach in relevant strategies and measures.
- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions to enhance ecological connectivity between, or join up sites either through physical corridors or ‘stepping stones’
- Demonstration and implementation of nature-based solutions (including green infrastructure) to improve awareness and engagement on nature and biodiversity and boost behavioural change
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated monitoring systems, including data collection and observatories to respond to biodiversity and ecosystem service issues and facilitate evidence-based decisions and pilots.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of climate change adaptation, mitigation and air quality, for example:

- Training schemes related to biodiversity, promoting its management or the planning and implementation of environmental protection and nature-based solutions, green and blue infrastructure, etc.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)

1	2.7	2.7.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*50 = 2.5 (rounded down to 2)	50
1	2.7	2.7.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*30 = 1.5	30
1	2.7	2.7.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*50 = 2.5	50

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	2.7	2.7.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	50	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
1	2.7	2.7.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	50	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
1	2.7	2.7.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	106	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters; 4000 approx)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to maintain, enhance green/blue infrastructure and to better protect biodiversity. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to rivers, environment, natural protection, public green, etc.

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes to improve biodiversity protection and enhance green and blue infrastructures, and drive change in certain policy fields, also for a more effective transition towards more resilient regions. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to biodiversity protection and the enhancement of green and blue infrastructure could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

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Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The academic sector (both private and public) is highly relevant as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in terms of biodiversity preservation and development of green/blue infrastructure. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their societal commitment for biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure.

By acting as multipliers to their networks they promote educational initiatives to raise awareness on biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure development. They may help gather data and engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.7	079	34,152,850

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.7	01	34,152,850

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	2.7	33	34,152,850

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
 (300 characters)

Smart and just energy transition

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions**

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

According to the territorial analysis, and the EU target to increase energy efficiency by at least 32,5% until 2030 there are various fields of intervention with high potential for improving the overall energy efficiency of the NWE area. Energy performance in buildings and in transports is still low in many programme areas. Furthermore, the deployment of decentralised energy production and/or smart energy systems (smart grids and smart meters) is still low

Expected programme results

The programme intends to contribute to increasing the capacity of NWE communities to exploit the potential for improving energy efficiency and to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions for climate protection. It will be achieved by identifying opportunities that increase the energy performance of e.g. dwellings and public buildings, transport/mobility, of district heating and cooling network lines.

To achieve the desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key principles guiding a better embedded energy transition into territorial strategies and local initiatives, with a specific attention to energy efficiency improvements in different settings, promotion of smart energy systems (storage and distribution), prevention of energy poverty;
- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders to translate energy efficiency principles into policies, services, products and actions (e.g. by systematically including energy efficiency as a key issue to be considered in decision-making processes, as well as in the planning and adaptation of new and existing infrastructure, by increasing competences of workers in the building sector and others - transports, industries, etc.);
- Innovative technologies, solutions, products and services that improve energy efficiency in different settings and sectors (incl. transports) and avoid energy poverty are taken up ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs;
- Citizens, consumers and local communities are better empowered and engaged in a more efficient energy consumption.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies or action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of strategies or action plans to implement energy efficient solutions and technologies in the NWE territories.
- Joint development and implementation of strategies or standard action plans to help overcome barriers to energy efficiency, creating transnational networks / communities and removing obstacles in NWE
- Joint development of transnational strategies, coordinating regional roadmaps leading to multiplication and improvements in capacity, operational methods and processes for energy efficiency and energy storage in NWE- Establishment or delivery of joint strategies to help reduce energy poverty in NWE.

b) Pilot actions for testing solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable technologies and solutions in a real environment to improve energy efficiency in different sectors, including the building sector and transports (e.g. business models);
 - Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions regarding consumer engagement and acceptance to deliver energy savings by behavioural change;
 - Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions to digitize distribution grids and optimize energy consumption to better align energy offers and demands.
 - Demonstration and implementation of new modelling solutions to smart energy systems in NWE.
 - Demonstration and implementation of energy storage solutions to maximise their added value and facilitate energy transition in NWE.
 - Demonstration and implementation of models enabling energy poverty reduction (e.g. reducing energy costs, etc.)
- c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of energy efficiency, for example:
- Training schemes to support employees, citizens and businesses in the building and other sectors related to improve energy efficiency and performance.
 - Harmonisation of training curricula / curriculum units, (e.g. creation and recognition of labels, certificates, joint courses etc.), in energy transition.

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2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
2	2.1	2.1.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*45=2.25 (rounded down to 2)	45
2	2.1	2.1.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*27=1,35 (rounded down to 1)	27
2	2.1	2.1.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*45=2.25 (rounded down to 2)	45

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.1	2.1.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	45	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
2	2.1	2.1.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	45	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
2	2.1	2.1.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	95	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to energy efficiency. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity of the quadruple helix having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to energy

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer energy efficiency processes and drive change in certain policy fields, also towards the reduction of energy consumption and GHG emissions. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to energy efficiency and the reduction of energy consumption and emissions could be involved as they provide sound and independent

information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The research sector (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on energy efficiency measures. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation in the NWE area.

SMEs, and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in developing new solutions for energy efficiency. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their societal commitment for energy transition.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of energy efficiency. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to raise awareness on solutions to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions. They may help gather data and engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	044	15,368,783
2	ERDF	2.1	046	15,368,783

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	01	30,737,565

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	33	30,737,565

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
 (300 characters)

Smart and just energy transition

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **2.2 Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/200119, including the sustainability criteria set out therein.**

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

The EU has formulated a binding target to increase the use of energy from renewable sources which requires the EU to cover at least 32% of its total energy needs with renewable energies by 2030 (Directive (EU) 2018/2001). The NWE area is one of the highest energy-consuming regions in the EU. Most of the NWE countries are on track with the achievement of EU specific targets for Renewable Energy Sources (RES) deployment. There is, however, a significant unexploited potential for improving the renewable energy production and consumption mix, and breaking down barriers to achieve it. On the one hand, many regions in the area are still affected by fossil-based dependency, on the other, the potential for increasing the energy production from renewable sources and techniques is still high in many NWE areas (in particular, in solar, biomass, hydro, geothermal/heat pump, hydrogen and wind energy).

Expected results

The programme wants to contribute to increasing the capacity of NWE communities to exploit the potential to improve renewable energy production and consumption mix. To achieve the desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key principles guiding a better embedded energy transition into territorial strategies and local initiatives with specific attention to promoting the production and use of energy from renewable sources in different settings and sectors - incl. transports - (e.g. by supporting SMEs as technology developers, by supporting decentralised RES production, by introducing new financing and procurement schemes);
- Innovative technologies, solutions, products and services to increase use and production of renewable energies are taken up ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs;
- Citizens, consumers and local communities and businesses are better empowered and engaged in the green energy transition.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies, of action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of strategies or action plans to create/expand value-chains in the field of (RES to diversify renewable energy supply and maximize penetration of RES);
- Joint development and implementation of strategies or action plans to shift to RES for energy generation and/or diversify renewable energy supply.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions and technologies to facilitate the uptake of RES in different economic sectors, transport/ mobility, dwelling sector, etc. in NWE
- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable carbon capture storage (CCS) and carbon capture utilization (CCU) solutions and technologies based on RES in support of energy transition strategies.
- Demonstration and implementation of smart energy systems and smart energy storage solutions for decentralised production of renewable energy, integrating several dimensions: knowledge, technical solutions, models, market intelligence and social stakes.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of renewable energies, for example:

- Public awareness and acceptance campaigns on the benefits and adoption of RES, accelerating readiness for change;
- Training schemes for workers and businesses in different key economic sectors, e.g. heating and cooling, transport/mobility, dwelling, the farming and agrifood sectors;
- Training schemes in rural, urban and intermediate areas for RES production and management (e.g. use of agrifood waste/by-products for energy production through methanisation or other techniques);

- Boosting energy entrepreneurship by harnessing compatible renewable energy resources available locally and fitting them with community experience, capacities and wishes at the transnational NWE level.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
2	2.2	2.2.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*45=2.25 (rounded down to 2)	45
2	2.2	2.2.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*24=1.2 (rounded down to 1)	24
2	2.2	2.2.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*31=1.55 (rounded up to 2)	31

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.2	2.2.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	45	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
2	2.2	2.2.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	31	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
2	2.2	2.2.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	75	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to increased use and production of energy from renewable sources. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity of the quadruple helix having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to energy

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes to improve renewable energy production and consumption and drive change in certain policy fields. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the improvement of renewable energy production and consumption could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The research sector (both private and public) is of highly important as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on energy transition and RES. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in developing new solutions to increase use and production of energy from renewable sources.

Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their societal commitment for energy transition.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of renewable energies. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to raise awareness on opportunities to increase the use and production of energy from renewable sources. They may help gather data and engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	047	5,122,928
2	ERDF	2.2	048	5,122,928
2	ERDF	2.2	049	5,122,928
2	ERDF	2.2	051	5,122,928
2	ERDF	2.2	052	5,122,928
2	ERDF	2.2	053	5,122,928

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	01	30,737,565

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.2	33	30,737,565

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
(300 characters)

Transition towards a place-based circular economy

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy.**

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

The territorial analysis shows that the NWE area is rather advanced when it comes to adopting approaches for a resource-efficient circular economy. Most regions of the NWE cooperation area have a relatively low material consumption per capita despite their high economic performance. However, renewed efforts are constantly needed to reach higher targets in terms of waste management. Activities to transition to a more circular economy need further improvement and are not evenly distributed across the different territories and stakeholders. To be effective, the transition from a linear to a circular economy in the NWE area requires joint efforts by stakeholders across all sectors. Businesses, universities, third sector and research centres can contribute to the transition by developing competencies in circular economy and eco-design to use resources efficiently, prevent waste, implement product reuse, and recycling, etc. All these initiatives can serve as evidence-based examples for innovative circular economy business models and value chains. Policy makers can support the transition by promoting the reuse of materials and higher resource productivity by exploring pilots with their stakeholders, developing incentive schemes and access to financing for better waste management / resource efficiency. NGOs and citizen groups also play an important role in promoting the transition to a circular economy by mobilizing broad forces to carry out practical actions and putting pressure on businesses and governments to accelerate implementation.

Expected programme results

The programme wants to promote a more effective and balanced transition towards a circular economy by increasing the capacity of communities: to adopt a systemic and holistic approach towards managing products, components and materials throughout their whole value chain; promote new business models that encourage the sharing, use of or access to a commodity rather than ownership of goods; promote the transparent provision and management of information related to products, components and materials or design quality products that maintain their value over the whole consumption or use cycle best. Among others, the programme aims at identifying opportunities to prevent and / or reduce waste, use resources

more efficiently, limit the use of raw materials (e.g. recycle critical raw materials from co-products, biomass, fluids, composites, etc.), replace fossil-based resources, increase the capacity for waste collection and recycling, stimulate services, processes and product innovation, while at the same time contributing positively to the inclusive and sustainable development of all territories.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key principles of circular economy are better embedded into territorial strategies, community-led initiatives, manufacturing processes or business models, with specific attention to waste reduction, a limited use of raw materials and an increased capacity for waste collection and recycling;
- Citizens are more engaged in supporting the transition to a circular economy;
- Stakeholders (both public and private) are more capable to adopt innovative solutions for supporting the transition to a circular economy (e.g. re-thinking planning production / service delivery processes in key sectors such as e.g. building, manufacturing or agri-food to achieve circularity);
- Innovative solutions for supporting the transition to a circular economy, contributing in particular to waste reduction, a more limited use of raw materials and an increased capacity for waste collection and recycling, tailored to the needs of territories to ensure that the approaches proposed correspond to local or regional needs;
- Innovative technologies, solutions, products and services that enable a more circular economy are taken up by different sectors;
- Eco-design approaches are better supported and promoted in different economic sectors or across sectors through territorial approaches to eco-design.

Actions taken under Priority 3 should support cooperation, exchange and development of joint initiatives in circular economy in all NWE territories, with a particular attention to awareness-raising, community engagement and improvement of processes and technologies. In particular, it aims at embedding the key principles of circular economy when planning and implementing territorial strategies, community-led initiatives, manufacturing processes or business models.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies or action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of place-based strategies or action plans related to eco-design, waste prevention, circular and reverse logistics, waste-as-a-resource approaches (recycling, upgrading, reuse, circular loops for products and services) or other circular economy approaches. Strategies and action plans may involve digital platforms and

appropriate tools as well as relevant stakeholders from different parts of the value chains like e.g. agriculture/industry, retail, logistics, public services, end users/households/citizens.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of territorial and place-based circularity concepts (including business models, smart solutions, public strategies and financing schemes and incentives to reach critical mass stakeholders and resources);
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions, services and technologies in a real environment to permit the creation of new or extension of existing circular value chains;
- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable solutions that could reduce both inputs of materials and outputs of waste (including bioeconomy) and are able to close the loop of material streams in the NWE area;
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of circular economy, for example:

- Public awareness and acceptance campaigns on the benefits and adoption of circular economy;
- Training schemes to support workers in the key sectors (e.g. to adapt manufacturing processes and reduce waste, to adopt eco-design techniques, etc);
- Training schemes in rural, urban and intermediate areas to adapt circular practices to specific NWE territories (territorial and industrial ecology);
- Organisation of exchanges, capacity-building and awareness-raising campaigns on existing sustainable behaviours in order to introduce circular thinking and behaviour.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
3	2.6	2.6.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*87 = 4.35 (rounded down to 4)	87
3	2.6	2.6.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*30 = 1,5 (rounded down to 1)	30
3	2.6	2.6.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*87 = 4.35 (rounded down to 4)	87

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	2.6	2.6.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	87	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
3	2.6	2.6.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	87	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
3	2.6	2.6.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	208	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to promote the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to rivers, environment, natural protection, public green, waste management / resource efficiency etc.

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer resource-efficient processes, and drive change in certain policy fields, also towards a more effective and balanced transition towards a circular economy. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful,

especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or ‘para-public’ associations committed to the promotion and support of circular economy could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The academic sector (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on resource efficient economy. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in developing resource-efficient processes and products. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orientating funding and valorising businesses for their societal commitment to the transition to a circular economy.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of circular economy. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to make citizens more engaged in supporting the transition to a circular economy. They may help gather data and increase engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

- 2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)
n/a
- 2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)
n/a
- 2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	2.6	067	14,903,062
3	ERDF	2.6	069	14,903,062
3	ERDF	2.6	071	14,903,062
3	ERDF	2.6	075	14,903,062

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	2.6	01	59,612,247

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	2.6	33	59,612,247

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority) (300 characters)

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Improving territorial resilience in NWE through innovative and smart transformation

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.**

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

Transnational cooperation in NWE shall contribute to strengthen regions by reducing disparities in innovation capacities.

Actions in this priority will aim at improving territorial resilience and livelihoods through strengthening innovative and smart capacities. They will include in particular the uptake of R&D results and innovative solutions by public and private innovation players on a regional scale, strengthening Smart Specialisation Strategies, adapting existing innovative solutions and services

(including non technological approaches,) reinforcing the value chains in NWE and accompanying innovative actors in different ways (financial, technical, training etc. support). These actions will also contribute to make territories more resilient and more attractive to citizens.

As overarching principles, projects must demonstrate smart, multi-actor and cross-sectoral approaches and where possible feed into regional / national/ transnational strategies, policies and action plans.

This priority aims to improve regional territorial resilience by increasing innovation capacities to support public and private innovation players in NWE.

Building innovation capacity may include disruptive and significant changes in organisational processes in the uptake of (high or low) technologies, of digital tools, big data, of innovative solutions, etc. Innovation players will be encouraged to contribute to territorial resilience i.e. to overcome or mitigate crises and “bounce forward”, enabling the sustainability and cohesion of the NWE regions.

An increased cohesion in NWE will be sought through the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies and regional strategies answering for example challenges in relation to demographic change, mobility transition, housing, health, and the gathering of diversified economic structures including the 4-helix actors.

Innovative, (non-) technological and/or digital solutions shall target public and private innovation players in NWE, via e.g. the clustering / linkages of economic actors / clusters in NWE or the application of smart solutions to roll-out successful regional innovation ecosystem approaches in NWE. Approaches related to innovative decision-making and planning processes, empowerment, co-creation, governance innovation are encouraged.

NWE stakeholders will be encouraged to use big data, digital tools, (advanced) technologies to tackle their innovation gaps with the aim to increase the cohesion and sustainability of NWE underpinned by the economic/ smart or regional strategies they will have to target and implement.

In particular, joint integrated action is welcome for NWE public and private innovation players needing to close their possible ‘innovation gaps’ or adapt place-based innovative processes. Innovation gaps could be for example lack of knowledge in new technologies, digitalisation or access to data and services for citizens.

In the NWE area, marked differences can be observed in innovation capacities, the transition to digital, the smart transformation, as well as in the diffusion, uptake and implementation of (advanced) technologies and solutions. In this context, innovation shall be an enabler and a lever for economic development and resilient territories. This priority will support smart approaches based on innovation to develop transnational networks, value chains, sectors, solutions, products, processes and services and consequently feed into transnational and/or regional strategies. All along these activities, projects must ensure positive spill-over effects into their regions, contributing to the aim of a strong territorial resilience. In this sense, cross-sectoral projects implementing one or several aspects of strategies/policies will be welcomed as they concretely contribute to economic development and territorial resilience in NWE.

Strategies, action plans, pilot actions and solutions developed under this priority should foresee the implementation of cross-sectoral practical applications, including the adaptation of existing or newly developed solutions. Projects should be developed with an implicit motive to benefit all stakeholders, especially innovation players and citizens.

Expected programme results

This priority will support projects that build on the potential of innovative solutions, (advanced) technologies, data, digitalisation and tailor-made solutions based on knowledge and good practice to support balanced economic development and territorial resilience in NWE.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key principles of innovative and smart transformation are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives embedded.
- More and better strategies and solutions taken up to support innovation players in NWE innovation players to positively “bounce forward” from previous crises whilst monitoring and mitigating against future risks.
- Improved capacities of innovation players to better exploit and deliver Smart Specialization strategies (S3s/RISs), digital/smart transformation, regional strategies/policies to contribute to balanced economic development (e.g. artificial intelligence, industry 4.0, 3D-printing, Internet of Things, BIM, etc.) and territorial resilience.
- More and better strategies and solutions taken up for innovation players to help their regions benefit from digital transformation, (advanced) technologies, solutions and innovation, and their uptake.
- More and better strategies/policies all over NWE and solutions taken up for e.g. the provision of smart services in mobility with positive impact on environment, transnational implementation of strategies throughout NWE, etc.

- More and better strategies and solutions taken up (whether technological -data-driven, knowledge-based, etc.- and/or not – low tech, evidence-based good practice, provision of public services including the creation of standards for data sharing, etc.-) to foster innovation.
- Establishment or upgrading of integrated (data driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions about economic and territorial innovation as well as the smart transformation in NWE.
- Innovative and (non-) technological solutions to improve the attractiveness of NWE, to explore possibilities to improve the accessibility of the services in all places, and their digitalization. Smart villages, cities and regions will be encouraged.
- Innovation processes through empowerment and co-creation, service delivery innovations, territorial governance innovations and organizational innovations.
- New or adapted solutions and approaches for innovative decision-making and planning processes.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

- a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, for example:
- Joint development and implementation of strategies and actions plans related to smart transformation among public and private innovation players and/or the clustering of innovation actors and economic sectors around the smart and digital transformation (i.e. use of existing or newly developed information, data and knowledge, digital transformation of services) in NWE, in view of supporting balanced economic development and resilient territories.
 - Joint development and implementation of strategies and action plans to enable organisations to develop new / sustain existing transnational partnerships and adopt innovative and smart approaches, solutions, services and business models.
 - Design, uptake and implement balanced economic development and action plans linking economic clusters and innovation players throughout NWE (e.g. ‘Valleys’, clustering of S3s among NWE regions, networking of regional clusters/ economic development agencies, etc.)
 - Joint development and implementation of strategies and action plans to increase the quantity, accessibility and quality of the services in all places
- b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions to promote the digital transformation and innovation by public and private players in NWE
 - Demonstration and implementation of solutions related to (digital) innovation hubs and the innovative performance of value chains in key economic sectors across NWE to contribute to regional and/or transnational strategies, including the design, delivery, uptake and rollout of

tangible mechanisms to accompany public and private innovation players in the smart transformation of the NWE territories (e.g. business support programmes for SMEs and start-ups to roll out smart/innovative business models)

- Demonstration and implementation of smart, innovative technologies and solutions (whether financial, technological, digital, etc.) to roll out successful regional ecosystem approaches in NWE (e.g. S3s/RISs, clustering of economic sectors, etc.)
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions about economic and territorial innovation as well as the smart transformation in NWE.
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions related to smart village and/or smart city and/or smart regional approaches and the rollout of digital services,
- Implementing new or adapted solutions and approaches for innovative decision-making and planning processes

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of innovation for resilience, for example:

- Training schemes for NWE innovation players to exploit opportunities for innovation, digital / smart transformation and data use, and adapt / adopt relevant smart practices and solutions.
- Training schemes to help innovation actors to exploit opportunities for innovative decision-making and planning processes
- Training schemes to help innovation players to introduce smart, digital transformation and innovation
- Awareness raising activities and events to increase citizen and business engagement in regional development processes

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
4	1.1	1.1.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*92 = 4.6 (rounded down to 4)	92
4	1.1	1.1.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*31 = 1.55 (rounded up to 2)	31

4	1.1	2.6.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*92 = 4.6 (rounded down to 4)	92
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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
4	1.1	1.1.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	92	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
4	1.1	1.1.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	92	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
4	1.1	1.1.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	218	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

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2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to support balanced economic development in NWE. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contribute to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to innovation, digital and smart transformation

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer balanced economic development and planning processes and drive change in certain policy fields, also towards a more effective transition towards innovation and

smart/digital transformation. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the promotion and support of innovation and smart transformation could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative and smart services

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

The research sector (both private and public) is highly relevant as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge on innovative and smart measures. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop innovation, digital and smart transformation in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential for innovation and smart/digital transformation. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in developing new solutions for innovation, digitalisation and advanced technologies. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their commitment in innovation and smart/digital transformation.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of innovation and smart/digital transformation. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to raise awareness on innovative and smart solutions. They may help gather data and engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	1.1	010	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	012	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	013	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	019	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	024	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	026	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	027	7,839,631
4	ERDF	1.1	028	7,839,631

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	1.1	01	62,717,052

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	1.1	33	62,717,052

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
 (300 characters)

Inclusive NWE

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **4.1 Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy.**

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

This Specific Objective addresses NWE territorial imbalances in the labour market and employment, while also contributing to strengthen social and societal integration. The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area highlighted that rural regions and poor urban neighbourhoods and some industrialised areas show higher labour market disparities than other regions in NWE. Mismatches in the labour market and in the provision of public services are observed among the countries but also within countries.

The adverse but not yet fully known economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may heavily impact vulnerable people, areas, and labour markets in NWE. While, the vulnerability of individual sectors and labour markets may vary quite strongly across NWE regions, particular attention shall be paid to the negative effects on vulnerable groups and/or on the verge of facing “fragility” (e.g. non-exhaustive list: disabled, unemployed (including long-term), young people, single parents, NEETs, people living in a rural, intermediate or urban area, migrants, refugees.)

Expected programme results

The programme expects to increase the capacity of NWE communities to enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets, promote quality employment as well as to empower and increase the employability of vulnerable groups.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Key aspects of quality employment and its pertaining public services are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives.
- More and better strategies and solutions benefitting local communities and promoting the maintenance or enhancement of relevant place-based quality employment practices, tools and solutions.
- Uptake of integrated labour market related public services, ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs.
- Increased employability leading to more social/ societal integration of labour as well as balanced territories.

- More inclusive and place-based business models and business support programmes, including entrepreneurship, and principles of the social economy (e.g. by focusing on NEETs, disabled persons, marginalised persons).
- Increased knowledge and skills on data management and new technologies in the field of quality employment and its pertaining public services.
- Stronger stakeholder cooperation networks enabling the transfer of innovative approaches and/or the establishment of functional linkages in relation to quality employment and its pertaining public services among cities, rural, coastal or intermediate areas dealing with similar issues.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of place-based strategies or action plans to support employment policies (incl. policies on initial or further training and higher education), facilitating skills improvement and / or integration into labour markets.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable (technological and/or non technological) solutions for helping people in employment as well as ‘vulnerable’ communities to better access quality and sustainable employment (including more inclusive business models, business support programmes, public strategies and procurements, tools, training schemes, including entrepreneurial, and incentives, facilities such as third places, fab labs fostering place-based social/societal innovation, etc.).
- Demonstration and implementation of solutions, services and technologies to permit the creation and the maintenance of sustainable quality employment and of its pertaining public services (incl. transport and housing services, securing place-based basic services to encourage local quality jobs and labour mobility);
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions and respond to quality employment issues.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of quality employment, for example:

- Public awareness and acceptance campaigns on the benefits and adoption of place-based inclusive labour strategies, including the principles of social economy.
- Training schemes to support “vulnerable” communities and workers in general in relevant key economic sectors and / or under pressure to transition (e.g. online and physical training and digital skills).

- Training schemes to adapt to new specific needs of the NWE territories in terms of upskilling.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
5	4.1	4.1.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*29 = 1.45 (rounded up to 1)	29
5	4.1	4.1.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*37 = 1.85 (rounded up to 2)	37
5	4.1	4.1.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*84 = 4.2 (rounded down to 4)	84

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
5	4.1	4.1.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	29	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.1	4.1.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	84	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.1	4.1.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	67	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute

to include vulnerable groups by enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets as well as the access to quality employment. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix). Particular attention will be paid to those groups affected by the negative impacts of the green transition on labour and employment.

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to employment and pertaining public services

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes for more effective and inclusive labour markets and drive change in certain policy fields, also towards the promotion of quality employment. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the promotion and support of more effective and inclusive labour markets and quality employment could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres

Academia (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop employment and the provision of innovative services in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential to impact employment. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the access of the NWE area to sustainable quality jobs. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orienting funding and valorising businesses for their commitment to the transition to quality employment.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of quality employment and the provision of public services. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to make citizens more engaged in supporting the transition to quality employment and public services. They may help gather data and increase engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.1	134	6,630,483
5	ERDF	4.1	138	6,630,483
5	ERDF	4.1	139	6,630,483

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.1	01	19,891,448

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.1	33	19,891,448

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
 (300 characters)

Inclusive NWE

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **4.5 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.**

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

This Specific Objective addresses territorial imbalances and needs in NWE that exist with respect to health care access and the resilience of health systems. The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area showed that inhabitants of peripheral areas in NWE have generally more difficulties accessing healthcare services. Generally, there is a need to further improve accessibility of healthcare and long-term care services in rural areas and particularly in the peripheral areas of NWE

In addition, demographic change and further ageing of the population may also overburden healthcare systems and affect their capacity to meet the future care demand effectively. It indicates indicate an increasing need for innovative care services and new solutions for the health care systems of NWE.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the lack of resilience of healthcare systems in the individual NWE regions as well as the strong interdependencies between neighbouring countries and regions.

Expected results

The programme expects to increase the capacities of NWE communities to include “vulnerable” groups (e.g., non-exhaustive list: elderly people, chronically ill people, disabled persons or single-parent families, people with severe illnesses, homeless) by reducing imbalances in the field of health and access to care.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- Health, care, prevention and well-being in general are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives.
- More and better strategies and solutions benefiting local communities and promoting the maintenance and/or enhancement of innovative place-based health and care practices, tools and solutions.
- Better assistance to vulnerable population groups in improving their situation of health and well-being.

- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders (incl. professionals and carers) to adopt innovative solutions concerning health and care and provide better assistance and access.
- Stronger stakeholder cooperation networks enabling the transfer of innovative approaches and/or the establishment of functional linkages in relation to health and care among cities, rural, coastal or intermediate areas dealing with similar issues.
- Better preparedness in NWE with respect to health challenges associated with population growth/depopulation (e.g., further ageing of urban and rural population) as well as with unexpected large-scale events seriously affecting the population’s health.

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of place-based strategies or action plans to develop transnational solutions or approaches for better preventing and coping with health and care issues affecting the NWE population.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of territorial and place-based concepts to improve the health and care conditions of the NWE communities (including a holistic approach to health and wellbeing with shared gardens, local food circuits/ short supply chains, urban farming, etc.).
- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable (technological and/or non technological) solutions, services and technologies to improve the availability, the effectiveness, the inclusiveness and the accessibility of health and care services (e.g. telemedicine or other IT-based solutions / tools in the field of e-health and e-care)
- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of health and care, for example:

- Public awareness and acceptance campaigns on the benefits and adoption of innovative health and care practices.
- Training schemes to support health and care incl. well-being workers and carers.
- Training schemes to adopt innovative health and care practices over specific NWE territories;

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
5	4.5	4.5.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*23 = 1.15 (rounded down to 1)	23
5	4.5	4.5.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*30 = 1.5	30
5	4.5	4.5.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*68 = 3.4 (rounded down to 3)	68

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
5	4.5	4.5.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	23	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.5	4.5.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	68	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.5	4.5.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	54	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to include vulnerable groups by reducing imbalances in the field of health care access as well as by increasing the resilience of health systems. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government government/public organisations, industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities relating to health and care

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes for more inclusive health and care services, and drive change in certain policy fields. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the promotion and support of more inclusive health and care services could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remits in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools, higher education, training centres

The academic sector (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop employment and the provision of innovative services in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential to impact the health and care sectors. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in the health and care sectors. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orientating funding and valorising businesses for their commitment to the improvement of health and care sectors.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of health and care. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to make citizens more engaged in supporting the transition to better health and care services and tools. They may help gather data and increase engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.5	160	8,051,793
5	ERDF	4.5	161	8,051,793

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.5	01	16,103,586

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.5	33	16,103,586

2.1 Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)
 (300 characters)

Inclusive NWE

2.1.1 Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) (300 characters). **4.6 Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.**

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

This Specific Objective aims to enhance the role of culture and sustainable tourism in the economic and social development of NWE. This sector was and still is severely affected by the negative economic consequences emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The territorial analysis of the transnational cooperation area showed that rural and remote areas in NWE can increase the use their competitive advantages (e.g. rich natural assets, “hidden gems” to alleviate highly frequented regions, ...). Local tourism can help promote sustainable tourism (longer seasonality, larger target groups incl. “vulnerable” people/groups, eco-friendlier and “slow” approaches, sustainable access and mobility modes, holistic networking of local interdependent professionals) and it can contribute in halting depopulation and upskilling professionals.

There are also potentials for developing innovative transnational cultural projects and supporting creative and cultural industries, especially as elements to stimulate social and societal cohesion and inclusion, as well as to empower and regenerate “deprived” areas (whether urban, rural, intermediate or coastal areas).

Expected results

The programme expects to contribute to a sustainable, inclusive and balanced development by enhancing the capacities of NWE communities to multiply the potential of culture and tourism, taking into account the green and digital transformation.

To achieve these desired changes, the following results are expected:

- More sustainable and territorially balanced tourism in the whole NWE area, reconciling the interests of touristic and cultural organisations, of inhabitants and of visitors, and encouraging joint local engagement.
- Sustainable tourism and culture are better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives.
- Higher transnational visibility of / and links between local specificities existing in the NWE territories (i.e. natural and cultural heritage assets and best practices/experiences, incl. gastronomy).
- A better access of “vulnerable” person groups (e.g. non exhaustive list, old, disabled, unemployed, young people, single parents, NEETs, people living in a rural, intermediate or urban area, migrants, refugees....) to tourism and culture as well as their stronger direct involvement in local development initiatives.
- Empowerment of local authorities, academics, businesses and inhabitants allowing them to better valorise local hidden or unknown assets, also involving enhanced territory-related skills and networking in tourism and cultural development.

- Renovated or better preserved and more accessible natural and cultural heritage potentials, also including eco-friendlier access, mobility modes, tools and approaches to valuable natural landscapes and built assets.
- More inclusive and place-based business models and business support programmes, including entrepreneurship, and principles of sustainable tourism and culture.
- Stronger stakeholder cooperation networks enabling the transfer of innovative approaches and/or the establishment of functional linkages in relation to tourism and culture among cities, rural, coastal or intermediate areas dealing with similar issues;

Future cooperation projects shall be implemented through a combination of the following categories of activities:

a) Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, for example:

- Joint development and implementation of place-based strategies or action plans to support tools and skills for e.g. valorising cultural heritage, branding or tourism marketing, as well as develop risk management and response tools.

b) Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions, for example:

- Demonstration and implementation of territorial and place-based concepts for culture and/or tourism.

- Demonstration and implementation of scalable and replicable (technological and/or non technological) solutions, services and technologies in a real environment for valorising natural and cultural heritage or tourism assets (e.g. innovative IT-based solutions).

- Demonstration and implementation of solutions for local authorities, businesses, academics and / or local inhabitants to better promote tourism and cultural activities within integrated territorial development strategies or community-led initiatives.

- Demonstration and implementation of integrated (data-driven) monitoring systems and observatories to facilitate evidence-based decisions and to respond to tourism and cultural issues.

c) Capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of tourism and culture, for example:

- Public awareness and acceptance campaigns on the benefits and adoption of more sustainable tourism and cultural practices, and awareness raising about common natural and cultural heritage.

- Training schemes to support workers in the tourism and cultural sectors (e.g., to adapt tourism and culture professionals' skills to sustainability and resilience).

- Exchanges of practices between public authorities and other stakeholders dealing with similar issues.

2.1.3 Indicators

Table 2: output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
5	4.6	4.6.O.1	Strategies and actions plans jointly developed	Strategy/Action plan	5%*33 = 1.65 (rounded up to 2)	33
5	4.6	4.6.O.2	Pilot Actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot Action	5%*42 = 2.1 (rounded down to 2)	42
5	4.6	4.6.O.3	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5%*94=4.7 (rounded up to 5)	94

Table 3: result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
5	4.6	4.6.R.1	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Strategy/Action plan	0	2021	33	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.6	4.6.R.2	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	94	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation
5	4.6	4.6.R.3	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	Organisations	0	2021	76	Programme Monitoring Data	Please see the methodology explanation

2.1.4 The main target groups (7000 characters)

Target groups can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that contribute to multiply the potential of culture and tourism in the NWE area. Target groups include public and private actors from the four segments of government government/public organisations,

industry/businesses, research/academia, as well as civil society/citizen representation (also known as the quadruple helix).

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes:

Local/regional/national authorities, EGTCs, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations with responsibilities related to tourism and culture (like tourist offices, tourism and cultural agencies, destination management organisations, etc.)

The involvement of local, regional and national public authorities is particularly important due to their capacity to steer processes to enhance the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic and social development and drive change in certain policy fields. Involving relevant regional and national authorities from the NWE partner countries might also be helpful, especially for gaining a broad strategic oversight on the topics addressed or for "lifting" activities at a higher level.

Agencies or 'para-public' associations committed to the promotion and support of culture and sustainable tourism could be involved as they provide sound and independent information on that topic in terms of sectors and stakeholders and can have remit in the provision of innovative services.

Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools, higher education, training centres

The academic sector (both private and public) is of high relevance as it is an innovation driver which creates and spreads knowledge. In particular, it is expected to provide scientific insight and evidence to regional challenges and to further encourage and develop tourism and culture in the NWE area.

SMEs and business support organisations

SMEs and business support organisations (BSOs) represent a driving force of the economy in the NWE area and have particularly high potential to impact tourism and culture. Acknowledging their role, the programme wants to involve SMEs and BSOs to increase the competitiveness of the NWE area in the tourism and culture sectors. Moreover, they can help drive behavioural change at business and industry level by orientating funding and valorising businesses for their commitment to the improvement of tourism and cultural sectors.

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups

Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations and citizens groups may help to coordinate communication and collaboration within the field of tourism and culture. By acting as multipliers to their networks, they promote educational initiatives to make citizens more engaged in supporting the transition to better touristic and cultural services and tools. They may help gather data and increase engagement to influence coming or existing policies. They may develop and implement community-based solutions

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments (7000 characters)

n/a

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 4: dimension 1-intervention field

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.6	166	22,375,291

Table 5: dimension 2-form of financing

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.6	01	22,375,291

Table 6: dimension 3-territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	SO	Code	Amount (EUR)
5	ERDF	4.6	33	22,375,291

3. Financing plan

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)								
IPA III CBC ¹								
NDICI-CBC ¹								
IPA III ²								
NDICI ²								
OCTP ³								
Interreg funds ⁴								
Total								

¹ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.
² Interreg B and C.
³ Interreg B, C and D.
⁴ ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.

3.2 Total appropriations by fund and national co-financing

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)				
	Priority 1	ERDF											
		IPA III CBC ⁵											
		NDICI-CBC ¹											
		IPA III ⁶											
		NDICI ²											
		OCTP ⁷											
		Interreg funds ⁸											

⁵ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

⁶ Interreg B and C.

⁷ Interreg B, C and D.

⁸ ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.

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)			
	Priority 2	(funds as above)										
	Total	All funds										
		ERDF										
		IPA III CBC										
		NDICI-CBC										
		IPA III										
		NDICI										
		OCTP										
		Interreg funds										
	Total	All funds										

DRAFT

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

The Interreg North-West Europe (NWE) programme took several steps to involve relevant programme partners in the preparation of the 2021-2027 period. Interreg North-West Europe will also seek to ensure their involvement in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

A. Preparation of the 2021-2027 programme

The involvement of relevant programme partners in the preparation of the 2021-2027 programme had 3 main objectives:

- Inform on and ensure transparency in the design process of the new programme towards all interested stakeholders.
- Collect feedback and input on key territorial challenges, themes to be addressed and target groups to be supported.
- Assess the potential environmental impact of the 2021-2027 programme. Involve all.

In order to reach these objectives, a wide range of initiatives were taken. While some of these were specific to the preparation of the new programme (events, stakeholder consultation, SEA) others came as part of the usual way of functioning of the NWE programme bodies (national committees). The programme's communication channels, notably the NWE website and social media channels, strongly supported these initiatives and are also described below.

1) The National Committees

Throughout the design process, and in compliance with article 8 of the Common Provisions Regulation, the EU Member States involved in the NWE Programme have regularly consulted the programme partners located in their territory,

Member States have collected the opinion and feedback of the programme partners located in their territories on the programming process and programme preparations ahead of every programming meeting (NTF - *North-West Europe Task Force on the future*). Programming documents have been shared in advance to allow for these national

consultation processes, and their opinion has been conveyed at the programming meetings.

2) Programme events

Since 2019, the NWE programme implemented a series of activities with the aim of informing stakeholders and NWE citizens on the design process of the future NWE programme with opportunities for programme partners to provide feedback.

The first activity took place in December 2019 in the form of the event “NWE making an impact!”, held in Tourcoing, France. In this event, 370 participants had the opportunity to provide input on their expectations for the next programme. The inputs provided by participants were included in the follow-up “Highlights” publication released in April 2020 and made available on the programme website.

Furthermore, the NWE programme organised two online networking events in 2021, tackling the topics of a “Greener NWE” – held on 20 May - and an “Innovative and inclusive NWE”, - on 22 June. The events were designed to ensure the transparency of the programme preparation process. The programme area and the status of discussions on the future thematic orientations were presented to participants, who also had the opportunity to network and discuss with potential partners for the future programme. Together, these two events had over 700 participants and comprised specific sessions on nine themes expected to be covered in the future programme.

3) Stakeholder consultation survey

The stakeholder consultation survey was launched in February 2021, with the main objective to collect feedback and input from current programme beneficiaries and future potential applicants on the policy objectives (POs), specific objectives (SOs) and types of actions (ToAs) considered in the draft proposal for the Interreg NWE Programme 2021-2027 as of January 2021.

The survey aimed to obtain responses regarding:

- the level of interest in the different themes proposed at PO/SO level;
- the level of interest in the different topics proposed at ToA level;
- the topics within the proposed ToAs where there is the most potential for transnational collaboration;
- practical examples / spheres of application of the proposed ToAs;
- major topics that may be missing within an SO or ToA;
- the wording / the clarity of our ToAs and target groups;
- additional target audiences that may be relevant for different ToAs;
- the areas of common interest across programmes and address the question of complementarities between programmes.

The survey was open for about 5 weeks, running from 25 February until 28 March 2021. To facilitate potential respondents' willingness to contribute, the survey was accessible in the four programme languages (Dutch, English, French and German). The survey was widely disseminated among the programme partners in each country with the support of the NWE Contact Points.

A total of 412 responses were collected, which illustrates a high interest of stakeholders in the Interreg NWE Programme 2021-2027. Responses from Belgium, France and Germany accounted each for 20% to 25% of all responses, whereas responses from the Netherlands, Ireland and Luxembourg ranged from 3% to 15%.

Respondents from 60 NUTS 2 regions participated, representing nearly all NUTS 2 regions of the NWE territory. All levels of public authorities, higher education institutions and universities and SMEs participated in the survey.

After the closure of the survey, an extensive consultation report was drafted, including the outcomes of the consultation and a number of conclusions and recommendations.

As a follow-up of the stakeholder consultation, two main actions were undertaken by the North-West Europe Task Force on the future of the programme. On the one hand, the outcomes of the consultation were taken into consideration in the elaboration of the future programme priorities. The outcomes corresponding to each priority were discussed and inserted when relevant in each priority. On the other hand, the stakeholder consultation report has been published on the programme website to inform the programme partners and all interested parties. Finally, the recommendations in the consultation report will also be considered when developing the Programme Manual and other programme documents.

4) The environmental impact of the programme

The Strategic Environmental Assessment draft report was finalised in June 2021, on the basis of a scoping note consulted with the environmental agencies of the NWE Member States. From that moment until October 2021, the draft report was sent to the Member States environmental agencies for consultation, and to the French Environmental Authority.

The feedback provided by all environmental authorities was included in the final feedback.

(The information about the public consultation of the SEA will be inserted when it is closed).

5) Communication channels

The programme's main communication channels were regularly mobilized to broaden the reach and the impact of the initiatives mentioned above.

A dedicated section reflecting the evolution of the preparations of the VIB NWE programme was launched on 22 September 2020. It includes:

- Links to the NWE territorial analysis and the EU regulations used as a basis for the negotiations between NWE Member States.
- Details on the programming process, timeline and expected territorial coverage.
- Specific information on the scope, objective and timeline of the stakeholder consultation. This section was regularly updated and promoted via the programme's social media channels (Linkedin and Twitter).

Similarly, the programme used its seasonal newsletter to inform its stakeholders on the on-going discussions. Specific articles on the future programme and the launch of the stakeholder consultation were added to the October 2020, February 2021 and September 2021 issues of the newsletter. Each issue was circulated to about 7,000 people by email (all approved project partners, recipients subscribed to the mailing list via the website...) and was also widely disseminated at national / regional levels by the NWE Contact Points.

B. Involvement of programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Beyond the programme preparation phase, Interreg North-West Europe will involve relevant programme partners during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme. As in the preparation phase, the main objective is to ensure transparency in the way the programme is implemented and in the decision-making processes. This involvement also aims at enhancing ownership of the programme among partners.

While specific actions will occasionally be taken to involve specific audiences, the regular involvement of programme partners in the implementation of the programme will be done through the Monitoring Committee members. The programme partnership will be organised by each Member State and Switzerland following the national rules as concerns their composition, organisation, confidentiality and dealing with conflicts of interest.

The programme partnership in each country will allow the flow of information from the programme structures to the programme partners by notably participating in the communication and dissemination efforts of the programme at regional / local level.

The member state representatives in the North-West Europe programme will play a key role in both sending the information to the national committees, and in compiling feedback from them. This pivotal role of the national representatives will be particularly

visible in their tasks concerning the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme, and in the participation in the Monitoring Committee meetings.

The programme might also involve, upon invitation, relevant EU umbrella institutions and organisations, with an observer role in the MC.

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)

The Interreg North-West Europe Programme has undergone substantial changes in 2021-2027, with a new geography, new topics to address and new types of projects to support. The development of an efficient, adapted, and coherent communication approach is therefore crucial for our programme to achieve its objectives in terms of reach-out, impact and durability.

The present section addresses these challenges by looking at the four main phases of a Programme lifetime: programme set up, project application, project implementation and capitalisation. In each of these phases, communication activities will aim to make the NWE programme as clear, accessible, and open as possible.

The content of this section will be further developed through a comprehensive Programme communication strategy for 2021-2027, which will translate itself into annual implementation plans to be approved by the Monitoring Committee.

Programme set up

Objectives

- Involve stakeholders in the design of the Programme
- Raise awareness of potential applicants
- Bring together programme bodies around a common communication strategy

Target audiences

- Potential applicants
- Interested stakeholders in the Programme design and outcome

Monitoring and evaluation

- Stakeholder consultation reach out; participation in events

- Uptake of input from NWE stakeholders

Project application

Objectives

- Identify and raise awareness of potential applicants
- Increase knowledge on the programme and its policy objectives
- Support project applicants

Target audiences

- Target groups in NWE as defined per PO and SO
- A balanced number of relevant newcomers and experienced applicants
- All NWE regions, in particular the ones less involved in the VB Programme

Monitoring and evaluation

- Event / workshop participation and evaluations, website traffic including use of online project development tools, newsletter subscriptions, social media engagement
- Level of satisfaction about accessibility and quality of information
- Average number of eligible and successful applications

Project implementation

Objectives

- Increase knowledge of all approved projects on Programme rules
- Ensure transparency on allocation of funds and proper visibility to EU funding

Target audience

- Approved project beneficiaries

Monitoring and evaluation

- Seminar / workshop / training participation and evaluation, use of online tools
- Level of satisfaction about accessibility and quality of information

Programme and project capitalisation

Objectives

- Maximise Programme and project impact in NWE and beyond
- Promote the added value and benefits of transnational cooperation

Target audiences

- Project beneficiaries from NWE, other ETC and EU programmes
- Decision makers at all levels

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- Stakeholders in the relevant fields
- Media
- EU citizens

Monitoring and evaluation

- Capitalisation event participation and evaluation, social media engagement and website traffic.
- Level of satisfaction with accessibility and quality of information

Communication channels

Communication channels will be developed with the aim to contribute to the Programme communication goals. They will be tailored to the audiences defined above, and to the specific needs identified for each programme phase.

This implicates the use of multiple channels, developed in a variety of formats. It will include regular workshops and events (online, offline or hybrid), videos, online networking platforms, publications, and a seasonal newsletter.

The Programme website will be the central channel of communication, with other tailored tools used to attract attention and generate traffic to the website. Looking into web-design trends, the new platform will aim to maximise user experience.

Increasing visibility of the Programme will also rely on a dedicated strategy for social media presence. Building on platforms previously used (Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube), NWE will explore specific metrics of awareness and engagement to adapt its approach based on follower feedback.

Budget and resources

Communication is a horizontal management task coordinated by the Programme's communication unit. Activities will have a transnational scope but will be disseminated at national level with the support of all Programme bodies, notably the NWE contact points, and translated in programme languages (DE, NL, FR, EN) when relevant.

The Programme will allocate indicatively 0,3%, of its total budget to the implementation of its communication activities. This will be further discussed by the Monitoring Committee in the framework of the annual technical assistance workplans.

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

The North West Europe programme aims at financing small-scale projects but will not make use of the small project funds possibility granted by article 25 of the Interreg Regulation.

As has been the case over the last programming periods, North West Europe will be open to any project size: applicants will be able to define the budget, the number of partners, the scope and the duration of the project needed for their cooperation action.

During the implementation phase the programme may however be confronted with the need to attract specific actors in the territory, for example, the need to attract smaller organisations and/or organisations new to the programme. Furthermore, there might also be a need to fund projects as a laboratory - or as preparation - for larger projects, or to cover specific thematic gaps/emerging themes identified. For this reason, specific calls for proposals targeting small-scale projects might be organized that are limited in financial volume, partnership and duration. The possibility to define small-scale projects will be applicable to every programme priority. Specific parameters will be defined in the respective project calls and the programme manual for applicants.

If small-scale projects are launched, the application, selection and monitoring processes of the programme may be adapted and simplified to be proportionate to the smaller size of the projects.

In the above scenarios, projects under 200 000€ (total eligible costs) are not foreseen, as the transnational nature of the projects and the geographic area covered by North West Europe require a minimum budget.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1 Programme authorities

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing authority	Hauts-de-France Region	Anne Wetzel Directrice Direction Europe	anne.wetzel@hautsdefrance.fr
National authority (for programmes with participating third or	(to be communicated by CH)		

partner countries, if appropriate)			
Audit authority	Interministerial Commission for the Coordination of Controls - in France	Martine Marigeaud, Présidente de la CICC Anne-Chrystel Guiochon, adjointe au chef de pôle et chef de mission d'une commission interministerielle indépendante	Martine.marigeaud@finances.gouv.fr Anne-chrystel.guiochon@finances.gouv.fr
Group of auditors representatives	To be completed when the Agreement is signed		
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Province of East Flanders	An Vervliet, deputy of the Province of East-Flanders Marie-Paule Boone Coordinator	an.vervliet@oost-vlaanderen.be marie-paule.boone@oost-vlaanderen.be

7.2 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat (3.500 characters)

Arrangements are already in place at the time of programme submission because implementation arrangements are kept from the 2014-2020 programming period. The joint secretariat is set up after consultation with the Member States under the responsibility of the managing authority. The staff recruited takes into account the programme partnership; the recruitment procedures follow the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal opportunities. The location of the joint secretariat is in Lille, France.

The joint secretariat assists the monitoring committee and the managing authority in carrying out their duties. It cooperates closely with the body in charge of the accounting function.

Where appropriate it also assists the audit authority. The assistance provided by the joint secretariat to the audit authority is strictly limited to administrative support, like the provision of relevant data for the drawing of the audit sample by the EC, the organisation and follow-up of the group of auditors meetings and written procedures, ensuring the communication flow between the different bodies involved (EC, audit authority, group of auditors members, external audit firm if applicable) and keeping an up-to-date list of the group of auditors members. This support does not interfere with the tasks of the audit authority as defined in article 77 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 [CPR] and in article 48 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 [ETC].

The joint secretariat is funded from the technical assistance budget.

Based on article 46(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 [ETC], the programme Member States decided that the management verifications (“First level control”) will not be done by the MA/JS, but through the identification by each Member State of a body or person responsible for this verification on its territory.

Should the MC decide to reimburse part of the project costs through simplified cost options in line with Articles 51 and 53 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 [CPR], the MC could decide on alternative FLC arrangements, which will be laid down in the management and control system description.

The JS will also provide the necessary assistance in view of the preparation of the subsequent North West Europe cooperation programme 2028-2034, if existing, until the new Managing Authority is designated.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partners countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission (10.500 characters)

Reduction and recovery of payments from beneficiaries

The Managing Authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the project via the lead partner. Project partners shall repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid. The Managing Authority shall also recover funds from the lead partner (and the lead partner from the project partner) following a termination of the subsidy contract in full or in part based on the conditions defined in the subsidy contract.

If the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from another project partner or if the Managing Authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner or sole beneficiary, the NWE-MS, depending on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located or, in the case of an EGTC, is registered, shall reimburse the Managing Authority based on Article 52 (3) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 [ETC]. Details on the procedure will be included in the description of the management and control system to be established in accordance with Article 69 of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060 [CPR]. In parallel to / after reimbursement of the irrecoverable amount by the NWE-MS to the Managing Authority, the NWE-MS holds the right to secure repayment from the project partner or sole beneficiary located on its territory, if necessary through legal action. For this purpose the Managing Authority and the lead partner shall assign their rights arising from the subsidy contract and the partnership agreement to the NWE-MS in question.

The Managing Authority shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the

participating Member States as laid down in the cooperation Programme and in Article 52 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 [ETC].

With regard to financial correction being the subject of a EC decision on the basis of Articles 104 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 [CPR], financial consequences for the NWE-MS are laid down in the section “liabilities and irregularities” below. Any related exchange of correspondence between the EC and an NWE-MS will be copied to the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat. The Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat will inform the Audit Authority/group of auditors where relevant.

Liabilities and irregularities

The Member State will bear liability in connection with the use of the Programme ERDF funding as follows:

- for project-related expenditure granted to project partners located on its territory, liability will be born individually by each Member State;
- in case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (the latter decided by the EC), the NWE-MS will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the respective NWE-MS territory. Where the systemic irregularity or financial correction cannot be linked to a specific NWE-MS territory, the NWE-MS shall be responsible in proportion to the ERDF contribution paid to the respective national project partners involved;
- For the technical assistance expenditure (calculated as a flat rate in accordance with Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 [ETC]), the above liability principles applicable for project-related expenditure and systemic irregularities / financial corrections may also be applied to TA corrections as they are the direct consequence of project expenditure related corrections.

If the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat, all NWE Member States become aware of irregularities, it shall without any delay inform the liable NWE Member States or the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat. The latter will ensure the transmission of information to the Audit Authority or group of auditors, where relevant.

In compliance with Annex XII referred to in Article 69 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 [CPR], each NWE-MS is responsible for reporting irregularities committed by beneficiaries located on its territory to the EC and at the same time to the Managing Authority. Each NWE Member States shall keep the EC as well as the Managing Authority informed of any progress of related administrative and legal proceedings. The Managing Authority will ensure the transmission of information to the Audit Authority.

If a Member State does not comply with its duties arising from these provisions, the Managing Authority is entitled to suspend payments to all project partners located on the territory of this Member State.

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

The programme will not make use of articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 [CPR]

Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of the programme area

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