

EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

Draft agenda



19 – 20 May 2026

Sava Center, Milentija Popovića 9,
Belgrade | Serbia





EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

19-20 May 2026

Belgrade | Serbia

Outline

The EU enlargement and neighbourhood agenda increasingly highlights the strategic importance of cooperation at the EU's external borders. Candidate countries - the Western Balkans countries, Moldova and Ukraine - face significant operational and strategic challenges in implementing cross-border programmes. Ensuring alignment with EU policy objectives, while achieving high-quality results and creating lasting impact in the border regions remains everyday challenge for majority of programmes. At the same time, programme authorities and EU stakeholders continuously seek effective mechanisms to support cooperation, enhance resilience, and promote shared European values.

Objectives

This event provides a platform for exchange, peer learning, and discussion of practical approaches between programme authorities and national stakeholders from both EU and candidate countries.

Participants will be able to:

- Share experiences and good practices across programmes and countries to address common operational and thematic challenges.
- Discuss emerging trends in cross-border cooperation, including project quality, partnership development, communication, and how to create added value of cooperation overall.
- Explore practical solutions to improve programme implementation, strengthen cross-border collaboration, and prepare for operational challenges and opportunities in the post-2027 programming period.
- Consider how external cooperation programmes contribute to the EU agenda, integration, resilience, and the promotion of European values.

Through a combination of thematic workshops, moderated discussions, and networking participants will engage in focused, interactive exchanges aimed at mutual learning, concrete approaches, and strengthening professional networks. The event will enable participants to identify solutions and create new ideas, to reinforce cooperation. This can be used as important input or at least as inspiration to start preparing for the future programming period.

Format

- Thematic workshops: Explore practical examples of implementation, partnership development, communication, and skills needed to achieve success
- World Café discussions: Moderated sessions to discuss shared challenges and practical options.
- Interact knowledge corner: Informal space to share tools, guidance, and publications relevant to programme implementation.

Who is it for

This event is for programme staff and national authorities involved in external cooperation, including:

- Interreg IPA, Interreg NEXT and IPA-IPA programme bodies
- National authorities managing external cooperation programmes



EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

19-20 May 2026

Belgrade | Serbia

- European Commission services and EU Delegations engaged in enlargement and neighbourhood cooperation

Day One

Tuesday, 19 May 2026

08.30 – 09.00

Registration and Welcome Coffee / Tea

09.00 – 10.30

Plenary: Welcome, success stories and setting the scene

Interact and European Commission

10.30 – 11.00

Coffee/Tea break

11.00 – 12.30

3 Parallel sessions:

- **Achieving project quality:** what is a good cooperation project, what can programmes do - directly or indirectly - to raise the quality of applications and project implementation; facilitate assessment and selection of good projects; we will brainstorm, share interesting examples, tips and tricks as well as available tools.
- **Connecting project results to wider policy priorities and cooperation frameworks:** Cooperation programmes operate within the EU enlargement and neighbourhood context and contribute to shared policy priorities across borders and wider territories. This session explores how programmes can better link project results to policy framework, other funding instruments and cooperation initiatives in order to strengthen uptake and long-term impact. Participants will exchange practical approaches to ensure results continue to generate value beyond project closure.
- **Visibility sprint - Turning cross-border results into impactful messages:** Cross-border programmes deliver real change across and beyond the EU. But that value is not always visible beyond the “usual suspects”. In this interactive Comms Lab, participants will work in groups to exchange ideas on how to transform Interreg achievements (such as project stories or programme data) into citizen-facing messages that demonstrate results, reinforce European values, and support the enlargement and neighbourhood agenda.

12.30 – 13.30

Lunch break



EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

19-20 May 2026

Belgrade | Serbia

13.30 – 14.30

Knowledge corner: discover the world of different tools and information sources to support your work

14.30 – 16.00

3 Parallel sessions:

- **Cooperation works** - cooperation programmes are all about working together with many stakeholders. Let's talk about skills needed to create and maintain good and lasting relationships and networks and reflect on how and what you can personally do in your role, with your behaviour and through your daily decisions.
- **Creating the right project partnerships:** how to bring together the right partners for meaningful cooperation, including those with complementary skills and expertise; how programmes can support, facilitate, and enhance networking, matchmaking, and collaborative project design. We will discuss practical approaches, highlight inspiring examples, and exchange tips, strategies, and tools to build strong partnerships.
- **Small actions, big values: Mapping external cooperation's contribution to European values:** What is in for candidate countries, and what it is in for the EU? How do grassroots projects in external cooperation translate into meaningful contributions to EU values? This interactive session helps practitioners identify and articulate the values dimension of their work - from small community initiatives to region-wide impact. We'll map the journey from project deliverables to democratic resilience, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion across borders.

16.00 – 16.30

Coffee break

16.30 – 17.30

Agora space: Can cross-border cooperation programmes and projects bring added stability and trust to their regions?

Open debate based on programme and project experiences

This open debate will explore how cross-border cooperation contributes to building trust, stability, and development in regions affected by political, institutional, or socio-economic challenges. Drawing on concrete programme and project experiences, participants will have a chance to reflect on the added



EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

19-20 May 2026

Belgrade | Serbia

value of cooperation in fostering dialogue, strengthening mutual understanding, and supporting long-term stability.

19.00

Networking reception (tbc)

Day two

Wednesday, 20 May 2026

09.30 – 09.45

Shaping cooperation programmes beyond 2027: readiness, adaptability and resilience
Plenary introduction

09.45 – 10.30

Discussion in groups

(Breakout rooms – 1st round):

-Enhancing cooperation programmes beyond 2027: What can programmes do to be ready for the future? This session will look at the future of Interreg programmes for the 2028–2034 period, with a focus on the upcoming programming phase as a key moment for setting strategic directions.

-From reactive crisis management to resilient programmes beyond 2027

This session will provide a platform for programmes to learn from each other on how they have been dealing with crises in the current programming period and support the preparation for a resilient post-2027.

10.30 – 11.00

Coffee/Tea break

11.00 – 11.45

Discussion in groups

(Breakout rooms – 2nd round):

-Enhancing cooperation programmes beyond 2027: What can programmes do to be ready for the future? This session will look at the future of Interreg programmes for the 2028–2034 period, with a focus on the upcoming programming phase as a key moment for setting strategic directions.

-From reactive crisis management to resilient programmes beyond 2027



EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders

19-20 May 2026

Belgrade | Serbia

This session will provide a platform for programmes to learn from each other on how they have been dealing with crises in the current programming period and support the preparation for a resilient post-2027

11.45 – 12.00

Feedback and key messages

12.00 – 13.00

Closing plenary: Lessons learned and looking forward

13.00 – 14.00

Farewell lunch