

EWRC Session Report: Your entry door for successful cross-border cooperation: Fit4Cooperation's bottom-up approach & Interreg Europe's peer review tool

15/10/2025, 09:30 - 11:00 CET, Jacques Delors building, Atrium 5



Fit4Co CBO presentation during the European Week of Regions and Cities. From left to right: Matthias Fink (Secretary-General of the EGTC Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino), Roberta Maccari (Project Manager, EGTC Euregio Senza Confini), Thorsten Kohlisch (Lead Manager, Interreg Europe), Chiara Fabbro (Project Manager, EGTC Euregio Senza Confini), Nicolas Singer (Head of Unit, Interreg Europe), Sandra Sodini (Director, EGTC Euregio Senza Confini), Veronika Meyer (Ombudsperson, Autonomous Province of Bolzano), Noemi Mascherpa (Project Manager, EGTC Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino), Birger Rudisch (Patient Advocate, Tyrol), Tommaso Marangoni (Project Manager and Session Coordinator, EGTC Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino).

On 15 October 2025, from 09:30 to 11:00 CET, a session was held at the Jacques Delors Building, Atrium 5, as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC). The session titled “Your Entry Door for Successful Cross-Border Cooperation: Fit4Cooperation’s Bottom-Up Approach & Interreg Europe’s Peer Review Tool” was organised by the partners EGTC Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino, EGTC Euregio Senza Confini, and Interreg Europe. The workshop focused on practical strategies to enhance cross-border cooperation among European regions. It brought together regional stakeholders, experts, and policymakers to

explore how bottom-up initiatives and peer learning can help overcome common challenges in cross-border collaboration.

Thorsten Kohlisch – Introduction to the workshop

The session, moderated by **Thorsten Kohlisch**, project manager by Interreg Europe, was structured in two parts. In the first part, three speakers presented their projects and organizations, explaining how cooperation is made possible in their respective contexts. The second part featured breakout sessions, where participants were divided into three groups. Each group rotated every 15 minutes, allowing attendees to listen to and learn from practical best practices shared by different speakers. At the end, a joint feedback and wrap-up session provided an opportunity for final discussion. The following section summarizes the contributions of each speaker as well as the key insights from the breakout sessions:

Part I – Introducing Fit4Co and Interreg Europe

Matthias Fink – Introducing the Fit4Co CBO project

During the session, **Matthias Fink**, who serves as the Secretary-General of the EGTC Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino, presented the Interreg-project Fit for Cooperation – Cross Border Obstacles (Fit4Co CBO). This initiative is a bottom-up project designed to foster cross-border cooperation by promoting locally driven solutions. Fit4Co CBO is a joint programme by EGTC Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino (project leader) and EGTC Euregio Senza Confini (project partner). The two project partner adopt different measures according to the common bottom-up approach.

In the Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino area, the project is organized into two distinct phases. In the first phase, each of the 19 tandems participating in the program received personalized guidance from a dedicated coach. This support was aimed at helping the tandems develop effective cooperation strategies. The second phase, which is currently in progress, focuses on the implementation of concrete pilot actions that were designed by the tandems during the initial phase.

Out of the 19 tandems that began the first phase, 17 have successfully continued their collaboration. These tandems worked on developing detailed project outlines. As part of the Fit4Co CBO process, each tandem defines the roles of the involved partners, specifies the overall project goal, and formulates a suitable funding strategy. The intended outcome is a complete project plan or application that can serve as a foundation for future initiatives.

The projects created by the tandems are tailored to address the specific needs of their respective communities. They cover a wide range of sectors, including civil protection and infrastructure.

An evaluation conducted during the program aimed to support the successful execution of Fit4Co CBO and to collect direct feedback from participants. The results of this evaluation showed that the majority of participants were satisfied with the outcomes. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of respondents reported that Fit4Co CBO helped them overcome significant obstacles to cross-border cooperation

Sandra Sodini – Addressing Cross-Border Obstacles

Sandra Sodini, Director of the EGTC Euregio Senza Confini r.l., presented her organisation's approach to the Fit4Co CBO project. Her team adopted a participatory approach, organizing meetings and promotional activities to engage potential beneficiaries. This led to the creation of six tandems, each bringing together an Austrian and an Italian partner from the regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT), Veneto (IT) and Carinthia (AT). Through a direct funding model, the EGTC provided each tandem with financial resources for external services, addressing specific identified cross-border obstacles. Ms. Sodini noted that such barriers remain a widespread issue across Europe, often due to different regional and national responsibilities and regulations. She stressed the need for effective multilevel cooperation to overcome these barriers and a clear understanding of investment priorities in border areas, described as “living laboratories.” She also emphasized that border regions are dynamic spaces that deserve the same attention and investment as central areas. Finally, Ms. Sodini underlined that removing cross-border obstacles would strengthen the internal market, making it more cohesive and resilient.

Nicolas Singer – Peer Review Tool

Nicolas Singer, Head of Unit of Interreg Europe, introduced the Peer Review Tool, which is designed to address major global challenges such as climate change and social inclusion. Unlike traditional cross-border cooperation initiatives, this tool is specifically tailored for policymakers and aims to strengthen their capacity to develop effective policies. The tool begins by identifying the specific needs of regions and then works collaboratively with stakeholders to find suitable solutions. Public bodies responsible for local or regional development policies are invited to submit an application for peer review support at any time. During the peer review process, participants receive an in-depth analysis of their policy challenge and have the chance to exchange experiences with relevant policymakers and receive potential solutions. To date, Interreg Europe has supported 262 projects through three calls for proposals. The organization is committed to making its resources and achievements widely known. To this end, it regularly organizes webinars and other outreach activities to share knowledge and promote its work.

Part II – Breakout Groups

The second part featured breakout sessions, where participants were divided into three groups. Each group rotated every 15 minutes, allowing attendees to listen to and learn from practical best practices shared by different speakers.

GROUP A – Fit4Co CBO Tandem “Citizen-Centred Healthcare”

The Fit4Co CBO tandem of the EGTC Tyrol-South Tyrol- Trentino “Citizen-Centred Healthcare” was presented by two partners: **Birger Rudisch**, Patient Advocacy of the State of Tyrol, and **Veronika Mayer**, Ombudswoman of the Local Parliament of South Tyrol. Although their offices have different structures, they both promote patient rights and supports individuals facing challenges within the healthcare system, such as issues related to data protection or medical malpractice.

The breakout room began with the partners briefly sharing how their collaboration started and the main outcomes achieved. Inspired by a Fit4Co presentation in Innsbruck, patient advocate Birger Rudisch proposed a regional partnership between Tyrol and South Tyrol to address patient challenges that often go unresolved despite strong healthcare systems. This initiative led to the formation of a tandem focused on supporting patients, which later expanded to include Trentino, creating a cross-regional collaboration aimed at improving healthcare support across borders. Early efforts centered on building mutual understanding and defining shared goals. By the end of the Fit4Co process, the partners had produced a brochure detailing patient rights and cross-border healthcare support, and organized a public event on 26 October 2025 featuring an information stand with doctors and large anatomical models allowing visitors to explore how these organs function. The tandem expressed their commitment to continuing awareness-raising activities and strengthening cross-border healthcare cooperation.

The breakout session concluded with a discussion on the main challenges faced during the project. Language was a key barrier, as the team worked in both German and Italian. To address this, they used AI translation tools, and one member began learning Italian to improve communication. Another challenge was the difference in healthcare systems: Austria’s insurance is privately managed, while Italy’s is tax-funded and state-run. When patients seek cross-border care, the Ombudspersons help them navigate legal frameworks and EU regulations, connecting them with the right support. The discussion stressed the importance of informing not only patients but also policymakers and stakeholders to

Besides its experience learning aspect, a peer review helps public authorities build their network and removes obstacles for fostered cooperation.

Together, Elena Ferrario and Nicolas Singer presented different examples of European cooperation through the peer reviews, for different stakeholders. The exchanges focused on the accessibility of the tool, which represents an opportunity for a smooth dialogue between different administrative levels. As participants noted, the peer review process is accessible in 36 countries and entirely supported by the Interreg Europe team.