



Evaluation plan

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1. Background and legal requirements

The present evaluation plan has been developed according to the provisions of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 (CPR, articles 50, 54, 56 and 114), Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 (ERDF Reg., article 14) and the Commission guidance documents on monitoring and evaluation¹ and on evaluation plans².

The evaluation plan sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the programme, taking into account the lessons learned from evaluations made in previous programming periods and the budgetary framework. The plan is meant to facilitate informed programme management and policy decisions and to support programme implementation and its result orientation. It sets out the framework to properly plan and implement quality programme evaluations with the aim to secure the programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

During the 2007-2013 programming period, INTERREG IVC undertook several studies and evaluations (e.g. mid-term evaluation, mid-term evaluation update, study on exchange of experience processes) which provided relevant information for the development and focus of the Interreg Europe Operational Programme. These productions will be taken into consideration for the evaluation of Interreg Europe.

Progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities (when available) will be reported in the annual implementation report (AIR) for the years 2019, 2021 and the final AIR. By 31 December 2022, the MA will submit to the EC a report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programme period.

The planned evaluations are set out in the present paper, the description is indicative for evaluations planned beyond a 3-year period. New evaluation needs might occur during the programme lifetime. Therefore, the evaluation plan will regularly be reviewed by the monitoring committee and it might be adapted according to the programme needs.

The present evaluation plan follows the DG REGIO monitoring and evaluation guidance, and includes the following elements:

- ✓ subject and rationale (sections 2, 3 and 5)
- ✓ evaluation questions (section 5)
- ✓ methods and data requirements (sections: 3.1)
- ✓ duration and tentative date (section 4)
- ✓ estimated budget (section 6)

¹ Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation - European regional development fund and cohesion fund - Concepts and recommendations (March 2014):

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf

² Guidance Document of Evaluation Plans (February 2015):

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf



2. Scope of the evaluation plan

2.1 Role and objectives of the evaluation plan

According to articles 56.3 and 54.1 of the Common Provision Regulation 1303/2013 there is a request for impact evaluations: “*during the programming period, the managing authority shall ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact, are carried out for each programme on the basis of the evaluation plan and that each evaluation is subject to appropriate follow-up in accordance with the Fund-specific rules. **At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the European Structural & Investment (ESI) Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority.** All evaluations shall be examined by the monitoring committee and sent to the Commission*”.

And furthermore, “*the impact of programmes shall be evaluated, in the light of the mission of each ESI Fund, **in relation to the targets under the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth** and, having regard to the size of the programme, in relation to GDP and unemployment in the programme area concerned, where appropriate*”.

This evaluation plan sets out an evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the programme, proportionate with its financial allocation and taking into account the expected evolution of the programme and the elements that are to be reported, including the ones related to the performance framework. It represents a management tool for the implementation of the Interreg Europe programme by supporting quality evaluations to be used effectively by the Managing Authority in order to contribute to the implementation of an evidence-based programme.

The Interreg Europe evaluation plan covers both impact and implementation evaluations aiming at, on one side, capturing the effects of the intervention and, on the other side, looking at how the programme is being implemented and managed.

The overall objectives of this evaluation plan are:

- to provide a framework to plan impact and implementation evaluations;
- to improve through proper planning the quality of evaluations carried out during the programming period;
- to facilitate informed programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings;
- to ensure that evaluations provide inputs for relevant annual implementation reports and other reports and for the 2020+ programming process.



The specific objectives as far as the impact evaluation is concerned are to evaluate:

- whether the programme succeeded in achieving the objectives of each priority,
- whether the programme contributed to the target of the EU2020 objectives.

2.2 Coverage of the evaluation plan

This evaluation plan refers to the Interreg Europe Programme, co-financed by ERDF under the European Territorial Cooperation goal. The programme covers the 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

2.3 Synergies with other programmes and initiatives

The programme welcomes and will promote whenever possible synergies and collaborations with the other pan-European programmes INTERACT, URBACT and ESPON, with other Interreg and mainstream programmes as well as with other institutions from the cooperation area carrying out evaluations, in view of widening the evaluation perspective, enriching results of the evaluation activities and avoiding duplications.

3. Evaluation framework

3.1 Evaluation methodology and data requirements

According to the EU Commissions guidelines, there are two main groups of methods that are suited for impact evaluations:

- the theory based methods³ and
- the counterfactual based methods⁴

Theory based impact evaluation is based on establishing the theory behind an intervention (the theory of change) and assessing whether it has been implemented according to that theory in order to judge the contribution of the intervention to observed effects.

The counterfactual method does not per se explain why a given intervention makes a difference. The core element of a counterfactual impact evaluation is to compare two groups/areas to see what has been the change in the group/area with the intervention and in the group/area without the intervention.

The means and resources of the Interreg Europe programme are very limited in relation to the eligible area and challenges that have to be met. In this challenging context, the theory based methods appears much more adapted for Interreg Europe. Compared to the counterfactual methods which will be mainly quantitatively based, the theory based methods are expected to give more composite (qualitative as well

³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/theory_impact_guidance.pdf

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research-topic/counterfactual-impact-evaluation>



as quantitative) knowledge about how and why the programme has an impact. This knowledge is expected to enhance the understanding of how interventions funded by the programme functions. The quality of an evaluation relies in particular on the quality on the data it builds on. The evaluation questions will determine what data need to be collected, and when.

One of the main sources of data will be the database used for projects monitoring. All the main data from projects will be available on this database as well as specific statistics. In particular, the monitoring database will provide the overview of the outputs and results generated by the projects.

There may be also a need for new data to be collected specifically for the evaluation. Evaluators may make use of interviews (e.g. with programme bodies, beneficiaries, other main target groups such as Managing Authorities of Structural Funds), desk researches (e.g. projects website, programme documents such as application form, and project's progress reports), benchmarking as well as surveys and analysis of case studies (e.g. on approved projects). Depending on the specific type and topic of each evaluation, the relevant tool and data requirements will be selected. Beyond the programme monitoring system, the annual implementation report of the policy learning platforms may also provide useful information.

Studies and evaluations undertaken under INTERREG IVC (e.g. mid-term evaluation, mid-term evaluation update, and study on exchange of experience processes) may be taken into consideration if relevant.

Further details will be provided in the terms of reference for the selection of the evaluation experts but it will be up to the bidders to propose the most suitable evaluation method and data requirements.

3.2 Evaluation function

The **Monitoring Committee (MC)**, representing the Partners States, has a steering and deciding role with regards to the development and implementation of the evaluation plan. It examines, approves and reviews the evaluation plan (article 110 (2) of CPR), in view of ensuring that emerging needs in terms of evaluation activities are reflected in the plan. The MC also examines the progress made in the implementation of the plan and the follow up given to the findings of the evaluations (article 110 (1) (b) CPR).

In compliance with the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of the programme, the **European Commission** will have an observer role and therefore can advise the MC at all stages of the evaluation process.

The **MA** and **Joint Secretariat (JS)** will carry out all activities related to the set up and implementation of the evaluation plan. These comprise activities related to organising MC meetings, contracting, coordinating and ensuring quality control with/of external experts; coordinating with EC, INTERACT, Interreg programmes and others.

3.3 Evaluation process

The MA has the responsibility for designing and delivering the evaluation plan and presenting it to the MC for approval. The MA prepares the plan in cooperation with the JS.

The MA/JS presented the evaluation plan at the third MC meeting in the Netherlands. The evaluation plan should be seen as a strategic document, through which the MC takes a stand on the expected main results



of the programme and their timing. The MC is expected to discuss and approve the evaluation plan. The MC shall approve any amendments which are deemed necessary.

The follow-up and status of the evaluation plan will be discussed at least once a year. When relevant, an updated evaluation plan will be presented at the MC meeting. The MC members will contribute actively to its development. The review of the evaluation plan could be combined with the approval of the annual implementation report in which progress made in implementing the evaluation plan will be reported. Any follow-up measures of evaluation findings will also be reported to the MC.

After MC approval of each version of the evaluation plan, the MA shall submit the plan to the Commission for information. The plan is submitted through the SFC system. Information on the evaluation plan will be published on the programme website.



The MA is responsible for the tendering of external experts. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation shall be drafted with the support of the JS. For the ToR Commission guidance shall be used as well as previous MA experience on public procurements and evaluations.

3.4 Involvement of partners

Relevant partners (e.g. Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, Certifying Authority) shall be involved in the evaluation of programmes within the framework of the Monitoring Committee meetings. Therefore, the involved partners shall examine the progress made in the implementation of the evaluation plan and the follow-up given to the findings of evaluations.

In line with the article 5 of CPR, involvement of relevant partners at national level in elaboration, implementation and follow-up of evaluation shall be ensured by the Partner States.

Within the same framework, the partners shall also be consulted on the report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period, to be submitted by 2022.

3.5 Evaluation expertise

Article 54 (3) of the CPR regulation states that evaluations are to be carried out by experts (internal or external) that are functionally independent from the authorities responsible for programme implementation. The structure of the MA and JS does not foresee separate departments/units dealing with evaluation matters and therefore such functional independency cannot be ensured. Therefore evaluation will be carried out by external experts to be selected through an open and transparent tendering procedure.

Still, the programme intends to guarantee an efficient use of the human and financial resources allocated to evaluation activities as well as to ensure ownership of such activities from the programme. Therefore, a mixed approach of internal and external expertise will be used. As a general rule, evaluations will be carried out by external experts especially when complex issues such as impact evaluations are concerned and when complex methodologies or data collection have to be applied and carried out. The MA and JS will provide them with information and input from the monitoring of the approved projects, programme developments and ongoing discussions. Data collection will be completed by the experts whenever necessary (e.g. through surveys, desk research, interviews, case study analysis, benchmarking).

3.6 Training programme

Training activities that can support the evaluation process for the Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat, and Monitoring Committee representatives may be organised if deemed necessary. In particular the working group on Evaluation set up by INTERACT shall be taken into consideration on this regard.

Training activities may refer to:

- Planning and managing evaluations, making quality control of evaluation reports;
- Qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and methods for impact assessment;
- Coaching for MA/JS staff.



3.7 Use and communication of evaluation' results

The evaluation reports will be published on the programme website. The final evaluation reports will be transmitted through the SFC system as well. In addition, the programme will actively promote the findings of evaluations through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. through thematic workshops for beneficiaries, policy makers and other stakeholders; through social media and community development, whenever relevant) as they are foreseen in the communication strategy.

Besides the regulatory requirements, the Interreg Europe intends to use the evaluation outcomes as a tool to improve the implementation of the programme and to inform the development of the next programme post 2020.

3.8 Quality management strategy

To ensure quality of programme evaluations, sufficient time will be foreseen to plan and procure evaluations. For the latter, specific criteria will be defined in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts. They will relate in particular to competencies and expertise in evaluation, in particular evaluation of Cohesion policy and ETC programmes. Evaluators will be required to use a sound methodology in the performance of their tasks. They will also be required to produce inception, interim and final reports on the evaluations carried out. MA/JS will be responsible for quality control of the outsourced evaluation activities.

The MC will be regularly informed of progress on evaluation activities, their outcomes and will also receive evaluation reports.

4. Evaluation timing

The timing of impact evaluations has to be balanced. In general, it should be scheduled as late as possible to enable the availability of results but also as early as possible to allow the findings to feed into the policy process. The evaluation is carried out as follows:

- **External evaluation – end 2018 / beginning of 2019**

- Impact evaluation

- Analysis of the Action Plans produced at the end of phase 1 by first call projects
- Analysis of the results achieved by Policy Learning Platforms (PLPs)
- Analysis of the results of the second survey to the Managing Authorities

- Implementation evaluation

- Use of TA budget
- Programme management
- Communication strategy



The results of this evaluation will feed in the Annual Implementation Report 2019 (CPR Art.50). First lessons learnt during the programming period 2014-2020 will also be highlighted.

- **Update of the evaluation – end 2020**

Impact evaluation

- Analysis of the results achieved by the first call projects at the end of phase 2
- Analysis of the Action Plans produced the end of phase 1 by second and third call projects
- Analysis of the thematic results of the PLPs
- Analysis of the results of the third survey to the Managing Authorities

Implementation evaluation

- Use of TA budget
- Programme management
- Communication strategy

The results of this evaluation will feed into the Annual Implementation Report 2021 (CPR Art.50) and the report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period (CPR Art.114). It will also highlight the lessons learnt during the Programming Period 2014-2020 for the future Interregional Cooperation Programme 2021 – 2027.

The planned evaluations, the relevant timing and budget are listed in the table below.

	When	What	Indicative Budget
External evaluation	End 2018/ beginning 2019	Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project achievements - PLPs achievements - Survey MAs Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of TA - programme management - Communication Strategy 	140.000 EUR
Update external evaluation	End 2020	Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project achievements - PLPs achievements - Survey MAs Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of TA - programme management - Communication Strategy 	100.000 EUR



5. Possible evaluation questions

The programme evaluation shall answer questions such as those proposed below. The questions are only indicative. They will be further specified in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts or in the concept description for the evaluations carried out internally, by MA/JS.

Impact evaluation

Specific objectives 1.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of research and innovation infrastructure and capacities.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing regional policies in the field of research and innovation infrastructure and capacities?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the performance of EU regions in the field of research and innovation infrastructure and capacities?

Specific objectives 1.2: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of innovation delivery.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing policy instruments of EU regions in the field of innovation delivery?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the performance of the EU regions in the field of innovation delivery?

Specific objective 2.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, supporting SMEs in all stages of their life cycle to develop, achieve growth and engage in innovation.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing policy instruments in the field of SME competitiveness?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the competitiveness of the EU regions?

Specific objective 3.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, addressing the transition to a low-carbon economy.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing policy instruments in the field of low carbon economy?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the low carbon performance of the EU regions?



Specific objective 4.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of the protection and development of natural and cultural heritage.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing policy instruments in the field of protection and development of natural and cultural heritage?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the performance of EU regions in the field of protection and development of natural and cultural heritage?

Specific objective 4.2: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, ETC programmes, aimed at increasing resource-efficiency, green growth and eco-innovation and environmental performance management.

- to which extent the programme has contributed to changing policy instruments in the field of resource-efficiency, green growth and eco-innovation and environmental performance management?
- to which extent the programme has contributed to improving the performance of EU regions in the field of resource-efficiency, green growth and eco-innovation and environmental performance management?

**Overall programme objective:**

- To which extent the programme has contributed to more efficient use of Structural Funds?
- To which extent the programme has contributed to the EU2020 objectives?

Implementation evaluation**Efficiency of programme procedures**

- Are the steps from project generation to contracting as well as project monitoring efficient? What can be improved (identify bottlenecks and lessons learned)?

Effectiveness of partnership

- Has the programme succeeded in involving its stakeholders and in particular the managing authorities of the Growth and Jobs programmes programmes?

Efficient use of the Technical Assistance budget

- Is the volume of Technical Assistance (TA) resources sufficient to ensure an efficient management of the programme?

Effectiveness of the programme management

- Are the human resources of the JTS in terms of amount and skills adequate to fulfil its various tasks?

Effectiveness of the programme communication strategy

- Is there sufficient awareness and knowledge from European regional and local authorities about the existence and role of the Interreg Europe programme?

6. Budget estimated

From the technical assistance budget (TA), EUR 240,000 have been reserved for external expertise for evaluation for the whole programming period 2014-2020. The TA budget is updated and approved by the MC on an annual basis. Thus, the budget for evaluation may be revised if deemed necessary.