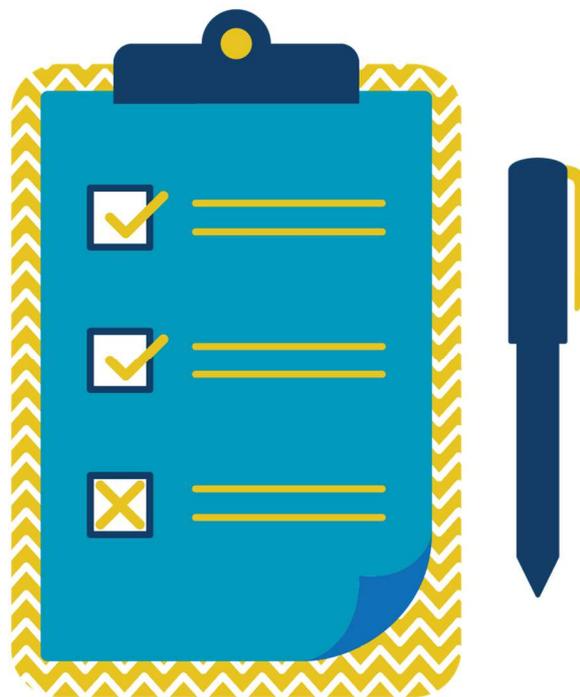


# Interact IV Evaluation Plan

30 May 2023

Approved at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Interact IV Monitoring Committee meeting,  
Prague, Czech Republic



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# 1. Background

Since the creation of Interact in 2002, the successive Interact programmes have developed and occupied a unique position. Interact is a part of the Interreg community, and also slightly outside it. Interact is able to connect the ideals of the regulation with the people implementing on the ground. It brings knowledge together, using its knowledge of Interreg programmes and community members as well as its own expertise.

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*Cooperation can be complex; our job is to make it easier.*

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In more technical terms, Interact IV is a cooperation programme of the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg) and contributes to achieving the goal by building administrative capacity for the institutions and stakeholders managing the Cohesion Policy investments in Interreg. Specifically, Interact contributes to the European Commission focus area on quality of governance and institutions as its impact on the effectiveness of how these programmes are managed. Interact IV builds on the successful foundation of the previous three programming periods incorporating lessons learned with updated methods of delivery. The programme is described in detail in the Interact strategic implementation document (SID). SID is the main Interact IV strategic document, which ties together a series of standalone living documents including the evaluation plan.

The Interact IV evaluation plan details the evaluation strategy for the entire programme implementation period outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Interact programme bodies responsible for the planning and implementation of the evaluations. It includes information on the planned evaluations such as the timing and type of evaluation, methodological approach, data needs and availability as well as resource needed.

## 2. Objectives, coverage and coordination

### 2.1. Objectives and legal basis

The aim of the evaluation plan is to ensure the timely implementation of Interact evaluations and their effective use.

This Interact evaluation plan strives to:

- improve the quality of evaluations (operational and impact) through proper planning, and providing a framework for these, and through identification and collection of necessary data;
- ensure that resources for funding and managing the evaluations are appropriate and proportionate (in terms of budget/ resources);
- ensure that the plan is conducted in a timely manner;
- ensure that the outcomes of the evaluation lead to appropriate programme management and decisions, and that they are used for learning and quality improvements for implementation;
- ensure the follow up and communication of the evaluation results.

Planned evaluations provide an independent contribution to:

- the Interact programme's efficiency and effectiveness through assessing and adjusting the delivery system of the programme as required, in order to ensure a high quality of service delivery from the Interact Offices;
- the programme's relevance and internal coherence i.e. different components of programme work together to achieve the outputs through revisiting the Interact IV intervention logic, and conceptualising the impact; in order to provide a high quality of services to Interreg programmes during their implementation;
- Interact's added-value through the analysis of the outputs and its aggregated impact in order to check whether the programme delivers visible and sustainable outcomes with high policy relevance.

The Interact IV evaluation plan has been drawn up in compliance with the provisions set out in Article 35 of the Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 and Commission Staff Working Document (SWD (2021) 198 final): Performance, monitoring, and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, Brussels, 8.7.2021.

## **2.2. Coverage and rationale**

The evaluation plan covers Interact Programme only. The programme is funded from ERDF and match-funding from the participating countries. The plan covers the entire programme period 2021-2027. It takes into account that the impact evaluation has to be completed at the latest by June 2029.

Interact programme covers the entire territory of the European Union, Norway and Switzerland. Focusing on facilitation of exchange of expertise, experience and good practice within the Interreg Programmes and their management bodies provides the unique nature of the programme; joint evaluation plans or joint evaluations with other programmes are not considered feasible due to the specific nature of the programme.

## **2.3. Analysis of relevant evidence**

The evaluation plan uses findings from the previous programming period as its foundation. There were three planned evaluations conducted with external evaluators during the Interact III programming period. These include a Case-based evaluation (2019) which focused on core activities of the programme to demonstrate the impact of the programme. In addition, an Operational evaluation (2021) was conducted to review the management structures and processes. The internal communication plan was included as part of the operational process. Lastly, an overall Impact evaluation (2022) was conducted to summarise the Impact of the programme.

The evaluators made several recommendations for the new programming period as part of the impact evaluation conclusion. These included:

- To retain the collaborative and participatory approach to working with Interreg programmes
- To remain a bridge between the European Commission and Interreg programmes
- To maintain the quality, accuracy and applicability of outputs
- To support Interreg programmes with their impacts, results and communication and capitalisation efforts
- To focus on effective and efficient use of Interact tools and services
- To consider services for more experienced participants

## **2.4. Coordination and exchange of evaluation practices**

Interact will seek, whenever relevant, synergies and collaborations with the other three interregional programmes - The Interreg Europe programme, URBACT and ESPON, as well as with other Interreg and Investment for jobs and growth (IJG) programmes, especially in the field of joint capitalisation and Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) if relevant with the aim of avoiding duplication and benefit from the complementary work in the same field. The interregional programmes have the common role of service providers – hence methods to measure effectiveness and efficiency in meeting clients' needs and anticipating future needs is essential to all of us.

Interact will also continue to organise events (trainings and workshops) for the Interreg programmes to exchange on various evaluation topics such as Terms of Reference (ToR), evaluation methods, data requirements, methods for data collections, evaluation findings, capitalisation, etc.). The aim of these events is to introduce new knowledge, create synergies among these programmes, and share lessons learned. Interact will also continue to facilitate networks on evaluation in order to encourage the Interreg programmes to exchange on their challenges and lessons learned in the planning, the implementation and the findings of the evaluations e.g. sharing findings and practices from the DG Regio Evaluation Network

## **3. Evaluation Framework**

### **3.1. Evaluation Function**

The overall responsibility for designing and implementing the evaluation process rests with the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee of the Interact Programme. Within this responsibility, Interact's Quality and Evaluation Manager and Interact's Quality Group will be responsible for the coordination and quality implementation of the process, and for reporting to the Monitoring Committee. This role is elaborated under section 3.2 below.

In particular, the following responsibilities are envisaged for the Monitoring Committee, and the Managing Authority:

#### **Monitoring Committee (MC)**

In accordance with Articles 30/2(b) and 30/1(d) (of the Interreg Regulation), the MC has to review and approve the evaluation plan as well as review and approve any amendments made to the plan. It also has to monitor the implementation of the plan, syntheses of evaluations, and the follow-up actions to the evaluation findings.

Based on the experience of the 2014-2020 programme period the MC will closely accompany and steer the evaluation process. This includes the creation of an evaluation working group formed with select MC members to advise on the evaluation process which will play a more active role in the development of the plan, the development of the Terms of Reference for the individual evaluations and consultations with the evaluators during the evaluation as per RoP Article 1(3)., preconsultation of the outcomes of the evaluation (draft reports).

#### **Managing Authority (MA)**

In accordance with Article 35/5 and Article 35/6 (of the Interreg Regulation), the MA has the overarching responsibility for drawing up the evaluation plan and submit the plan to the MC not later than one year after the approval of the Interreg programme. During the implementation of the evaluation plan the MA oversees that all evaluation related processes (both internal and external) follow the plan, and that in cases of deviations these are communicated to the MC and the evaluation plan is subsequently updated (Article 35/4 of the Interreg regulation).

Additionally, in accordance with Article 35/1(of the Interreg regulations), the MA shall carry out evaluations of the programmes related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations will also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and visibility.

In accordance with Article 35/7 (of the Interreg regulations) the MA will publish all evaluations on the website referred to in Article 36(2).

## **Quality and Evaluation Management**

In Interact, Quality Management is a horizontal function which is coordinated by a Quality and Evaluation Manager, (QEM) together with a Quality Group (QG). The QG is composed of representatives from each Interact office.

### **3.2. Preparation and implementation**

The MA has delegated the task of coordinating the preparation and implementation of the evaluation plan to the QEM with support from the QG.

The QEM is responsible for:

- Coordinating drafting the evaluation plan, including updating the plan when necessary;
- Coordinating the involvement of the evaluation working group formed with MC members;
- Supporting the preparation of ToR for external evaluators, and participation in the assessment of expert offers;
- Liaising with selected external evaluators in the course of their work;
- Coordinating agreed internal evaluation activities;
- Coordinating drafting reports summarising evaluation findings, assuring (under the supervision of the MA) follow-up to evaluation findings, and transparency of follow-up actions;
- Identifying internal training needs (relevant for carrying out agreed evaluation-related tasks internally), and that these needs have been met by appropriate learning actions utilising the variety of knowledge and capacity-building options

The MA remains responsible for the development and delivery of the evaluation plan. The plan will be discussed at MC meetings along and modified as required.

### **3.3. Involvement of other stakeholders**

The MA will involve the relevant partners in the evaluation of programmes within the framework of the Interact monitoring committee. Partners in this context include the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the European Commission or Interreg programmes. These partners will also be consulted on reports of the findings of the evaluations during the programming period.

### **3.4. Source of evaluation expertise**

Interact plans to utilise both internal and external sources in the course of the evaluation process, in order to capitalise on complementary competency and to address the issue of limited financial resources available for evaluation.

#### **a. Internal resources**

Internal evaluation will be used during the implementation of impact and operational evaluation activities. We place specific value on the use of internal resources for several reasons:

- In Interact we have intimate knowledge of our organisation, processes, activities and people. We have also established very good links to our stakeholders, from whom we obtain both formal and informal feedback in relation to the services we deliver to them.
- By involving internal sources in evaluation activities we also aim to use the outcomes of these evaluations to support long-term institutional learning; this will also help create a good learning exercise for internal learning to improve our performance.
- We have a number of staff members who are experienced and knowledgeable in the field of evaluation. This knowledge can be used internally to support and guide planned evaluation activities.

Typical tasks foreseen (but not exclusively) to be carried out internally relate to: Collection of data from different feedback channels established on a programme level, transfer of data into various programme reports and reporting systems, performing desk analysis (where relevant) with regards to various evaluation tasks, internally monitoring progress towards the achievement of indicators and conducting internal analysis in the case of deviations, collection of process review data and identification of follow-up actions.

#### b. External resources

In accordance with Article 35(3) of the Interreg Regulation evaluations shall be entrusted to internal or external experts who are functionally independent. The use of external sources is considered appropriate in order to secure impartiality of findings and impartiality of recommendations. In some cases, and with regards to specific evaluation questions, such expertise is needed for accountability purposes towards Interacts stakeholders. There is also little practical knowledge in the use and implementation of impact evaluation methods – the involvement of external sources will secure appropriateness and quality of methods applied, and of outcomes. Given the importance of findings that impact evaluation will provide, specific attention will be given to the quality of the proposed expert pool and the methodological approach applied.

We envisage that internal and external recourses will work in partnership, and that tasks will be implemented in a collaborative manner.

Experts will be selected within the terms of applicable public procurement rules. Evaluation experts will be appointed to lead on certain evaluation tasks – in cases where sensitivity, objectivity and accountability require this role; for example, in conducting a wider impact evaluation, evaluation of the management structure, etc. In these cases, Interact staff will have a supporting role, such as preparing necessary data, etc.

### **3.5. Training for staff dealing with evaluation**

Interact has an experienced internal knowledge base regarding evaluation. Interact staff lead on evaluation discussions, engaging Interreg programmes from all strands and experts from the Evaluation Unit of DG Regio. These provided an excellent opportunity to exchange on various evaluation topics and practices across the Interreg programmes. As described earlier, it is planned to discuss relevant topics along the evaluation life cycle such as preparing of the

evaluation plan, preparing the terms of references for evaluations, implementation of evaluations, etc. These events also provide a good opportunity for Interact staff to increase their knowledge about evaluation, and enable internal knowledge and expertise to be used for conducting and supporting the implementation of various activities in the evaluation framework set for our programme.

Interact has developed various e-learning courses to introduce new approaches and lessons learned in different evaluation topics; e.g., How to carry out impact evaluations? What are good methods for data collections? How to set up a good quality survey? Sharing lessons from previous programming periods.

Interact staff members will also participate, where relevant, in evaluation trainings offered by International and European organisations and institutions in order to expand their knowledge both for internal purposes and to enrich their on-going work with the programmes.

Lastly, Interact will work closely with external evaluators to provide insights and context as well as to increase knowledge on updated and practical approaches to conducting evaluations.

### **3.6. Use and communication of evaluations**

The key findings and recommendations will be presented and discussed at the MC meetings follow up measures will be defined by MA and presented to the MC, which will be informed, on a regular basis about their implementation. We will use the findings from the evaluations to make changes to the way we implement our programme. This could be changes to the way we manage the programme based on findings from operational evaluation or to a specific service based on the Impact evaluation. In addition, we will use the findings to inform the design of future programmes.

We will submit the evaluation reports when approved by the MC to EC through SFC. Interact's various communication channels will be used to communicate and disseminate the findings from the evaluations. These include: Interact's website, newsletter, and social media.

### **3.7. Overall budget for implementation of the evaluation plan**

The overall budget for external evaluations is estimated at EUR 110. 000 with a split of EUR 50.000 for Operational Evaluation and EUR 60. 000 for Impact Evaluation. The budget may be revised as deemed necessary.

# 4. Planned evaluations

Interact will carry out two types of evaluation: Operational evaluation and impact evaluation. The Interact IV programme started implementation of activities on 1.12.2022. In order to be able to make statements on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme, Interact needs to have carried out a certain amount of activities which will justify recommendations made.

Interact will initiate the process in the second half of 2024 with two aspects of operational evaluation: Progress towards achievement of programme’s indicators including operations of strategic importance, and evaluation of the communication strategy. Impact evaluation will be initiated in the second half of 2025 on a rolling basis. The proposed timelines will be reviewed and adjusted according to the implementation of our programme.

In addition to the planned evaluations, we will conduct an internal evaluation in 2025 on the Training Programmes since this is a new service delivery option which is directly linked to our indicators.

## 4.1. Evaluation timeline



Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
<b>Operational and communication evaluation</b>	Process evaluation to ensure proper functioning of the programme	Mix of internal and external expertise	Data on structure, HR review, SID	2024 (10 months)	50.000
	<b>Key criteria:</b>				
	Effectiveness, efficiency, and internal coherence	Review of organisation structures, roles and responsibilities	Organisation Chart, Role profiles, Job descriptions		
	<b>Key operational questions:</b>				
	Does the management structure support Interact to achieve its targets/support service delivery?	Survey among staff and survey among stakeholders in order to check on efficiency and effectiveness of mechanism to respond to user needs	Survey data, Review of organisational chart and roles		
	Does Interact have the appropriate processes to address anticipated client needs? e.g. work plan and follow up	Survey among users and non-users and Interact staff  Review of processes	Processes to capture client need  Work plan process		
	Do processes and procedures support	In-depth open (narrative) interviews	Survey responses		

Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
<b>Operational and communication evaluation</b>	effective, efficient, relevant, and coherent service delivery?	with MA/IS plus a sample of MC members, European Commission, Audit Authority, Paying Authority, Hosting Institutions and Heads of Interact Offices (developed and carried out by external experts)			
	Do Interact IT Tools and web solutions support effective, efficient, relevant, and coherent service delivery?	Survey among Interact staff and survey among users and non-users to check on efficiency and effectiveness of tools to respond to user need	User feedback, review of system structure		
	Are we on track with the financial implementation of the programme?	Review of financial data (planned vs reality), interviews with controllers	Financial data		
	<b>Key communication questions:</b>				
	Are we communicating efficiently both	External expert (Interreg expertise required)	Communication strategy		

Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
<b>Operational and communication evaluation</b>	internally and externally?				
	Have we reached our target groups?	Data Review	Analysis of data on campaigns  Use and satisfaction survey		
	What were the success stories or challenges?	Survey among set target groups (e.g. participants in events; campaign participants, networks)	Website statistics  Internal documentation capturing success.		
	What has prevented us from reaching all programmes?	Focus groups or in-depth interviews defined with participating and non-participating programmes	Target group responses  Social media statistics		
	What factors would increase uptake of services?	Data review	Data on communication activities available in-house		
	Are target groups satisfied with the new websites and access to information?	Review of existing data and additional surveys if required	Use and satisfaction survey		
	<b>Use:</b>				

Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
	Results would feed into programme improvement and 2028-2034 programming	Report shared with MC and published on website			

<b>Impact Evaluation</b>	Impact evaluation to check and showcase programme achievements as well as provide lessons learned for the remaining programming period and future period	External expert approach  Interviews, review of reports and existing data	Project reports available in the monitoring system including indicators  Programme documents including SID and work plans	2025 (13 months)	60.000
	<b>Key Questions:</b>				
	Was Interact able to contribute to strengthening the management capacity of programmes?	Document review  Expert led data collection	Check intervention logic and in-depth analysis of results and programme achievements through desk research, survey, interviews and case studies.		
	Was Interact able to contribute to strengthening the capacity of	Surveys, interview, Document review	Testimonials from programmes User feedback		

Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
	individuals working in programmes?				
	Was Interact able to contribute to increasing Interreg visibility?	Review of specific activities e.g. branding or campaigns	Campaign reports and statistics		
	<p>Relevance: To what extent are Interact objectives and provided services relevant with respect to actual needs?</p> <p>Coherence: Are Interact services complementary and, harmonized with other actors' interventions?</p> <p>EU added value: What is the EU added value of Interact services compared to what could have been achieved without?</p>	Interviews. Document review.			

Title	Subject and rationale	Methods	Data	Start and approximate duration	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
	<p><b>Use:</b></p> <p>Findings would be used to inform the next programming period</p>	<p>Report shared with MC and published. Dissemination of reports through social media channels.</p>			

## 5. Quality management strategy

The overall responsibility for steering and quality management of the evaluation process, from planning, through implementation and dissemination of results, is with the MA/QEM of Interact. In this process the following quality steps will be observed:

### Preparatory phase

Adequate planning of evaluations and ensuring availability of data

Detailed ToR and in consultation with MC

Agreement on key evaluation questions which takes into account the specific nature of the programme

Announcement of tenders through relevant communication channels and secure relevant response time

Selection of evaluation experts against clear/transparent competence criteria

Involvement of (relevant) parties in the assessment of offers submitted

### Implementation phase

Organisation of inception meeting with selected expert (or consortia) in order to discuss and agree on the process and work flow of each evaluation exercise, including milestone setting

Agreement on delivery of inception, mid-term and final reports by expert, and necessary regular updates

Engagement of Evaluation Steering Group in reviewing intermediate reports submitted

Securing early discussion of initial findings and how data is to be used and communicated later on

Assuring that all evaluation reports are shared with Interact's MC for approval

Securing transparency and visibility of evaluation findings by utilising various communication channels

## **Annex 1: List of abbreviations**

<b>CBC</b>	Cross-Border Cooperation
<b>CPR</b>	Common Provisions Regulation
<b>DG REGIO</b>	European Commission Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy
<b>EGTC</b>	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
<b>ETC</b>	European Territorial Cooperation
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IR</b>	Interregional
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>MC</b>	Monitoring Committee
<b>MOT</b>	Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière
<b>QEM</b>	Quality and Evaluation Manager
<b>QG</b>	Quality Group
<b>SID</b>	Strategic Implementation Document
<b>TN</b>	Transnational
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference