

Programming Post27 – Roles and responsibilities in programme management and implementation

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | November 2025

Overview

The session brought together representatives from Interreg programmes and the European Commission to reflect on the evolving roles of key programme bodies in the 2028–2034 period. Discussions were framed by the draft regulatory framework, which introduces the Performance-Based Approach (PBA) as a delivery method.

Participants addressed both continuity and adaptation, noting that while the structure of Managing Authorities (MA), Joint Secretariats (JS), Monitoring Committees (MC), Controllers, and Audit Authorities (AA) will remain broadly stable, their responsibilities will evolve in line with the new regulatory framework. The discussion underscored the need to clarify several provisions and ensure that regulatory changes are translated into practical measures that reinforce governance, accountability, trust, and the strategic objectives of Interreg programmes.

Methodology

The session combined presentations, a panel discussion with programme real life examples, and group discussion to capture diverse perspectives and practical experiences.

The introductory presentations established the context by outlining key regulatory changes and anticipated challenges for the 2028–2034 period. This was followed by a panel discussion bringing together representatives from MAs, JSs, MCs and the European Commission. The panellists offered both operational and strategic insights, reflecting on what has worked well, the challenges encountered, and expectations for cooperation among programme bodies in the next period. Particular attention was given to staffing, governance, and coordination mechanisms.

Key discussion points from the panel discussion and regulatory updates

The EC reaffirmed Interreg's strong compliance record, with an exceptionally low error rate of 0.07%, reflecting the robustness of current systems. While the upcoming programming period will maintain overall continuity, several regulatory adjustments and operational clarifications were introduced to enhance the results-orientation delivery.

Regulatory changes:

- Simplification of management and verification: Programmes are encouraged to move away from exhaustive checks, adopting proportional, ex-ante verification methods to reduce administrative burden.

- Audit Authority alignment: Audit activities will be adapted to checking milestones and performance targets, ensuring a results-oriented approach.
- Reinforced Partnership Principle: Greater emphasis will be placed on consultation and bottom-up approaches, requiring clear descriptions of partner selection in line with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership.
- Branch Offices: MAs may establish branch offices to improve operational efficiency.

Operational challenges and programmes perspectives

Programme representatives shared practical insights and concerns regarding governance and implementation:

- **Staffing and coordination:** While some differences are expected, many elements will remain unchanged; maintaining stable JS personnel is essential for effective support to Managing Authorities, beneficiaries and other programme bodies.
- Contractual gaps between programming periods hinder project closure. Permanent, experienced staff at the Joint Secretariat (JS) are essential for stability.
- Stability, clarity, and strong coordination between all authorities are key prerequisites; additional experience is needed before fully applying the new PBA mechanism.
- **Performance-Based Approach (PBA):** Limited experience raises concerns about its application. The integration of PBA should be approached with attention to Interreg's specific context and requirements.
- **Governance clarity:** Clear separation of accounting and funding responsibilities is critical to avoid conflicts, especially in centralized payment systems.
- **Best practices:** Monthly meetings of programme bodies and early clarification of roles were cited as effective measures.
- **Trust and harmonisation:** A shared message was the need to reinforce trust across programme structures and move towards greater harmonisation of processes and approaches in the next period.

A clear separation of functions within programme bodies is essential to ensure transparency and prevent conflicts between institutions. This requires well-defined management and control descriptions, supported by comprehensive rules of procedure that outline responsibilities and decision-making processes. From a national perspective, trust between institutions is equally critical. Strong inter-institutional relationships enable rapid problem-solving and foster an environment where challenges can be addressed effectively and collaboratively.

The discussions underscore the need for stability, clarity, and proactive coordination among programme bodies to ensure smooth implementation of regulatory changes.

The session continued with group work structured around the discussion of roles and responsibilities of programme bodies around three thematic areas: Partnership Principle and roles and responsibilities of MA, JS, MC and NA - Governance and cooperation, Management verifications and audit, and Communication and visibility requirements.

Highlights from discussion:**Room 1: Partnership Principle and roles and responsibilities of MA, JS, MC and NA - Governance and cooperation****Governance and Cooperation**

- Programmes still have diverse organisational arrangements, which makes managing change a key challenge.
- The composition of Joint Secretariat (JS) staff should reflect the needs of the programme area rather than the origin of individuals coming from the states participating in the programme, ensuring equal opportunities for all. Programme representatives emphasised that competence, experience, and stability should take precedence over nationality since, in practice, it is common for the JS to have team members originating from outside the programme area.
- Although JS branch offices are not explicitly referenced in the draft regulation, they are operationally valuable, particularly for CBC programmes ensuring that programmes remain accessible and inclusive.
- Strengthening the links between the JS, Managing Authority (MA), and Audit Authority (AA) is essential to ensure smooth cooperation and a clear division of responsibilities.
- National Contact Points (NCPs) play a crucial role in supporting the MA, beneficiaries, and applicants, facilitating engagement and participation for smaller actors such as SMEs and NGOs. Their contribution is particularly relevant in cross-border and transnational settings. Programmes can continue using NCPs even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the regulation.

Management, Control, and Audit

- The management and control system, including management verifications and audit responsibilities, requires further clarification under the new Performance-Based Approach.
- Part of the management verifications may be shifted to JS, raising questions of liability and the role of national controllers.
- The Audit Authority's responsibilities may evolve, emphasizing evidence-based verification while respecting compliance with EU and national rules and oversight by national authorities and the Court of Auditors.
- Coordination between MA and AA should be enhanced to ensure consistent and proportionate control across programmes.

Results, Performance, and Implementation

- Emphasis on results should be paired with clear milestones and intermediate reporting.
- Ensuring project impact within short timeframes requires balancing control mechanisms with accountability.
- Control of technical assistance serves as a practical example of effective implementation.
- Significant preparatory work is needed to operationalise these changes; Interact can support programmes in harmonising practices and engaging with the Audit Authority.

Room 2: Management verifications and audit

The breakout group discussed how the responsibilities for management verifications and audits could be organised within the new performance-based approach (PBA) proposed for the post27 period. It is planned that the payments between the Commission and programmes will depend on the achievement of milestones and targets as opposed to reimbursement of expenditure.

Participants noted uncertainties about the application of PBA at the lower level (programme–project relationship). It is unclear whether Interreg programmes will continue reimbursing expenditure or also adopt a performance-based model. This ambiguity makes it difficult to define management verifications and audit approaches.

- **Complexity of milestones and targets:** defining and approving milestones and targets will require significant work, they need to be as simple as possible and recorded by programmes, not projects. Programmes would wish for certain standards across programmes to reduce the administrative burden, ensure comparability and sound implementation. Also, a certain flexibility and adaptability throughout the implementation needs to be guaranteed.
- **Audit expectations:** despite the shift to a performance framework, audit authorities (AAs) are likely to continue checking underlying expenditure of operations, if the wording “ensure legality and regularity of the underlying transactions” remain in the regulation.
- **Need for mindset change:** auditors, controllers, and managing authorities (MAs) must adapt from cost-based to result-based verification; early common understanding and guidance will be crucial.
- **Verification focus:** the participants shared an idea for separating tasks - JS/MA verifying the content and indicators, and controllers focusing on procurement and other horizontal principles. Verification documents for milestone and targets would remain similar to current output evidence.
- **Challenges and risks:** there is a big uncertainty about liability sharing among Member States, protection of the EU budget without expenditure checks, and defining what constitutes an irregularity under a performance model. The feasibility of “N + 10 months” deadlines and the lack of clear eligibility rules and off-the-shelf SCOs were also criticised.

Open questions:

- Will the performance-based approach be extended to the lower level, namely to beneficiaries?
- How to link project-level outputs and achievements to programme-level milestones? How to link what is paid to the beneficiaries with what is reimbursed by the EC (considering Art. 59 (3) NRPP).
- What are the future roles of the bodies performing accounting function and AAs?
- How to ensure sound financial management, deal with procurement and beneficial owner checks, and apply GBER-like eligibility rules without detailed cost rules?
- How to understand Article 78 NRPP talking about SCOs and FNLC, if there are no eligibility rules or off-the-shelf SCOs in the regulations?
- How will risk-based management verifications work when risks are linked to milestones and targets rather than costs?

Room 3: Communication and visibility

Following a brief overview by Interact, participants contributed with their concerns, the points they welcome and open questions that need to be clarified regarding communications in post27.

- It is generally seen as a positive change from old to new regulations that the rules do not micromanage communication activities. For example, EU brand is simple, and details are left to programmes as it stands, and there is no mention of social media obligations, which is something to be decided at programme level.
- Exclusion of **financial corrections and special requirements for OSI promotion** is also welcome. Implementation of especially financial corrections was complicated.
- The translations of the funding statements (Annex V) could be improved.
- Potential comeback of **communication strategies** instead of the 4000 characters in the Interreg Plan as a basis of the programme communication is very welcome, including the planned requirement for approval by the MC.
- There is no longer a regulation-imposed **communication officer (CO) per programme** which is very concerning. In smaller teams, this role is likely to be phased out, with its responsibilities reassigned to administrative staff or project managers who may lack the necessary training or expertise in communication. The CO's role is not limited to designing and delivering programme-level activities. The CO role includes close, hands-on support to beneficiaries, helping them effectively communicate their results. CO's guide beneficiaries in expressing the value of cooperation itself, encouraging them to speak as one partnership rather than as individual organisations. CO's also play a key role in the project assessment phase. This early input supports more impactful communication during implementation and ultimately increases the visibility and perceived value of the European Union locally.
- Art. 8.3 (e) ERDF requires a description of communication and promotional activities in each chapter of the Interreg Plan, while the attached template for the Interreg Plan chapter does not provide space for such a description.

Open questions:

- What is the **EC Single Gateway** and what is expected from the programmes?
- Member States will continue to communicate via **websites**, as it is done in the current period. Not sure if 'Chapters' shall have a website or only central website?
- Emphasis is placed on **national communication coordinators** in the member states. There are many Interreg programmes involving non-member states. Who is supposed to carry out such duties in those countries?
- Art 18 (4) Performance, there is a mention of "The Commission shall implement information, visibility and communication actions and campaigns..." what does it mean? What do we do with this information?
- **INFORM EU network** is kept at the level of Country Communication coordinator. What does it mean for Interreg Plan?
- The two versions of the **funding statement** in EU27 and partner countries may create issues in practice. For example, will an Interreg programme with a MS and with a partner country (e.g., Poland-Ukraine) need to create two versions of the logo, which in addition need to be translated into Polish and Ukrainian, and therefore have six different versions of the logo?

Regulations and articles of particular significance

Art.10(1) ERDF, Art. 10(3) ERDF, Art.10(4) ERDF, Art.10(5) ERDF, Art.10(6) ERDF, Art. 6 NRPP, Art. 21(2) NRPP, Art. 51 NRPP, Art. 53 NRPP, Art. 58(2)(a) NRPP, Annex IV NRPP
Art. 8 (3) (e) ERDF, Art. 18 Performance, Annex V Performance

Conclusions, plans for followed up

Participants highlighted the importance of continuity and stability in programme structures. Overall, the simplification efforts were well received, and participants agreed that elements not explicitly set out in the regulation should not be automatically considered as restrictions. However, several elements require clarification to ensure effective governance, accountability, and operational coherence. Key success factors include clear delineation of roles, stability of staff, trust among programme bodies, and proactive coordination.

Clear guidance, common methodologies, and specific expertise will be required for defining, verifying, and auditing milestones and targets. There was consensus that auditors must be part of the system design from the outset to ensure feasibility and legal certainty, and that the Interreg framework should retain flexibility to adapt milestones to programme realities while protecting Member States' financial liability under the new model.

Further follow-up in 2026 will be considered as part of upcoming events and activities. Interact will continue to support programmes by providing guidance and facilitating the exchange of good practices, helping to address uncertainties in a harmonised and practical approach.

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