

Interreg Programme Management Handbook

Guide to the 2021-2027 period

The Interreg Programme Management Handbook comprises a series of factsheets. They can be read individually, or collectively, to understand the relevance of certain aspects of Interreg management. They cover the relevance, legal basis, key challenges and approaches to the given subject.

Factsheet | **Programming Process**

1. What is it? What is the definition of this work?

The Glossary on the European Commission website states that “Programming refers to the administrative mechanism used to pursue the objectives of the Cohesion policy funds. Multi-annual programmes ensure consistency and continuity over a seven-year period. Programmes relate to specific geographical areas at international, national or sub-national level, depending on the governance arrangements in place. Programme aims include identifying strategic priorities and indicative actions, outlining financial allocations, and summarising management and control systems”.¹

In practical terms, over a several years time period, Interreg programme authorities, in cooperation with stakeholders from participating Member States, partner countries and third countries, define strategic priorities, intervention areas, and financial allocations, as well as provisions on technical assistance, monitoring, evaluation, communication, eligibility, management and control and financial management. The result of this participatory process is the written text of the Interreg programme, which is formally adopted by the European Commission.

2. Why are we discussing it?

Interreg programmes exist to support the harmonious development of the Union’s territory at different levels². Programming process is an essential part of defining the strategic priorities and all provisions of the programme in line with the requirements set out in the relevant legislation (see chapter 3).

¹ [Inforegio - Programming](#)

² [Regulation - 2021/1059 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) – Interreg Regulation, Preamble, Recital 4

For 2021-2027 programming period, there are 5 Policy Objectives (Article 5 of Common Provisions Regulation - CPR)³:

1. **A Smarter Europe:** Promoting innovative and smart economic transformation.
2. **A Greener, Low-Carbon Europe:** Advocating for a transition towards a net-zero carbon economy.
3. **A More Connected Europe:** Enhancing mobility and regional connectivity.
4. **A More Social and Inclusive Europe:** Supporting social inclusion and equal access to opportunities.
5. **Europe Closer to Citizens:** Empowering local initiatives and sustainable urban development.

In addition to these, Interreg programmes, which focus on fostering cooperation across regions, incorporate two specific objectives (Article 14 of Interreg Regulation):

1. **Better Cooperation Governance:** Improving the efficiency of cooperation activities.
2. **A Safer and More Secure Europe:** Addressing security challenges and enhancing safety measures.

Programmes have to choose from the above-mentioned Policy Objectives and Interreg-specific objectives, taking into account the requirement for thematic concentration (Article 15 of Interreg Regulation).

3. What are the Legal references and basis for this topic?

The legislative framework for Interreg programmes in the 2021-2027 period is primarily based on Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 – Common Provisions Regulation and Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 – Interreg Regulation. This regulation sets the rules and guidelines for cross-border (internal and external), transnational, interregional, and outermost regions' cooperation.

Legislative Framework:

- [Regulation - 2021/1060 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) – **Common Provisions Regulation**, mainly:
 - Article 5 – Policy Objectives
 - Article 8 – Partnership and multi-level governance
- [Regulation - 2021/1059 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) – **Interreg Regulation**, mainly:
 - Section I – Subject matter, scope and Interreg strands
 - Section II – Geographical coverage
 - Section III – Resources and co-financing rates
 - Article 14 – Interreg-specific objectives
 - Article 15 – Thematic concentration
 - Article 16 – Preparation and submission of Interreg programmes
 - Article 17 – Content of Interreg programmes
 - Article 18 – Approval of Interreg programmes

³ [Regulation - 2021/1060 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) – Common Provisions Regulation

4. What are the challenges, key considerations and frequently asked questions?

A number of challenges have been acknowledged throughout the programming process:

- **Developing a strategy for the programme area** (including a jointly-agreed vision for the programme territory) that is representative of the needs of the territory, reflects on the nature of territorial cooperation, and supports the implementation of European (including, where relevant, macro-regional and sea basin) priorities at the same time. Due to the thematic concentration and result orientation approach, stakeholders need to prioritise and limit the scope of future support, and at the same time link it to the bigger European framework. This requires reaching agreements and decisions on the focus of the programme – specifically on the choice of Policy Objectives.- and on defining a limited number of results and result indicators for the programme area.
- **Identifying programme indicators** representative of the nature of the territorial cooperation objective programmes; in particular, with respect to capturing integration and performance-related results pertinent to the nature of the programmes. Every programme must have intervention logic on how supported actions and developed outputs address the territorial challenges and needs tackled by the programme. Interact elaborated [Common Interreg indicators 2021-2027 report](#) that focuses on the rationale, methodology and outcomes of the ongoing work with indicators within Interreg programmes.
- **Securing wide representation of stakeholders during consultations;** in particular, involving actors outside the public domain, while simultaneously making sure that a good stakeholder analysis will focus efforts to engage relevant stakeholders in the process through a wide mix of communication channels, see [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds](#).
- **Managing stakeholder expectations** has also been acknowledged as a challenge.
- Quality outputs of the SEA processes, and take-up and integration of the findings into programming discussions.
- **Dealing with new requirements** – the Risk Based Management Verification is novelty in most Interreg programmes and needs a lot of attention to set it up right. European Commission provided Reflection paper on Risk Based Management Verifications and Interact prepared Guidance on the risk-based management verifications and HIT Methodology. Both can be found on [Interact's website](#).

5. How are they addressed?

To address these challenges, programmes were encouraged to participate in training sessions and working groups focusing on exchange on above mentioned challenges. Also, several guidance documents were prepared both by European Commission and Interact.

6. How does it work in practice?

As already mentioned, this process is several years long. The main steps are:

1. **Establishing the Programming Task Force/Committee:** Form a dedicated group comprising representatives from participating countries, regional authorities, and relevant stakeholders to oversee and guide the programming process.
2. **Procuring external experts for programme drafting:** If internal resources are insufficient, initiate a tender process to hire a specialized company responsible for drafting the programme.
3. **Conducting socio-economic analysis with stakeholder consultations:** Perform a comprehensive analysis of the programme area, engaging stakeholders to identify the needs, challenges, and opportunities of the programme area, forming the foundation for programme objectives.
4. **Initiating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):** Evaluate potential environmental impacts of the proposed programme, integrating sustainability considerations into its design.

5. **Holding regular meetings of the Programming Task Force/Committee:** Facilitate ongoing discussions among task force members to review progress, address issues, and ensure coordinated development of the programme.
6. **Developing intervention logic and indicators:** Define clear objectives, expected results, and corresponding indicators to measure the programme's performance effectiveness.
7. **Drafting the programme document:** Compile the programme based on analyses and discussions, detailing strategies, actions, financial plans, and implementation arrangements.
8. **Conducting public consultation:** Solicit feedback from the broader community on the draft programme to enhance transparency and incorporate diverse perspectives.
9. **Internal validation of the draft programme:** Review and approve the draft within the Programming Task Force/Committee, ensuring consensus and readiness for submission.
10. **Securing agreements and co-financing commitments:** Obtain formal agreements from participating countries regarding the programme's content and their financial contributions.
11. **Submitting the draft programme to the European Commission via SFC2021:** Officially submit the programme through the Commission's electronic system for review and approval.
12. **Addressing European Commission observations:** Respond to any feedback or requests for clarification from the Commission to facilitate the approval process.

If an external company is engaged for drafting, many of these tasks can be delegated. However, continuous supervision, active involvement, and communication among all stakeholders remain crucial throughout the process to ensure the programme's quality and compliance with regulatory requirements.

7. Good practice examples, innovative approaches

Stakeholder Consultations - Engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, and potential beneficiaries, early in the programming process. This ensures that the programme addresses the actual needs and priorities of the regions involved.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening - Before initiating a full SEA, perform a preliminary assessment to determine whether the programme is likely to have significant environmental impacts. This can help decide if a full SEA is necessary.

The involvement of the desk officer from the European Commission is not only compulsory but can be very beneficial. They can help to navigate the process, answer questions or give feedback from Commission's point of view.

Interact also helps Interreg programmes during programming phase, organising events and providing various support.

Simplification measures are one of the important tools that can help in smooth implementation of the programme. **80 simplification measures** are collected in the the [Simplification Handbook](#).

The collection of **Simplified Cost Options** used by all Interreg programmes is available on [Interact's website](#).

European Commission published a [Report on the outcome of 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming](#), that **summarises the main objectives and novelties** of the policy framework and horizontal policy issues.

One of the positive takeaways is that **high commitment of programme partners** allowed to have the Cooperation programmes agreed and adopted much sooner than in the previous period.

Disclaimer: Cooperation can be complex, and while Interact's job is to make it easier, Interact cannot offer assurances on the accuracy of our pan-European information in any specific context.

Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

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