

# 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.

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### Factsheet | Programme Evaluation

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

Programme evaluation is a key element throughout the programme life cycle. It aims to enhance programme design, implementation, and assess the overall effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value of interventions. This is mandated by Article 45(1) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) and Article 35 of the Interreg Regulation.

The Interreg Regulation for the 2021-2027 period outlines two main types of evaluation:

- **Evaluation during the programming period (Article 35, Interreg Regulation):** This ongoing evaluation focuses on improving programme delivery and performance using criteria like effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and EU added value. It may also address inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and visibility, and can encompass multiple programmes.
- **Ex-post (retrospective) evaluation (Article 45(2–3) CPR):** Conducted by the European Commission, this evaluation examines the overall impact, effectiveness, and EU added value of the Funds (including ERDF and Interreg), assessing the social, economic, and territorial impacts by 31 December 2031.

#### 2. What are the legal references and basis for this topic?

The 2021-2027 regulations reinforce a results-driven approach to evaluation, shifting the focus from financial tracking to assessing programme impacts and performance.

Key regulatory elements include:

- **Intervention logic:** Evaluations must be based on a well-defined intervention logic, linking development needs, policy objectives, actions, and expected results. This framework underpins both performance monitoring and evaluations (Article 35, Interreg Regulation; Article 45, CPR).
- **Policy Objectives:** Programmes must align their intervention logic with the five ERDF/CF Policy Objectives and, where applicable, Interreg-specific objectives. This ensures that programme objectives are relevant to territorial challenges and aligned with macro-regional strategies (Article 15, Interreg Regulation).

- **Performance framework:** The performance framework includes both output and result indicators. A methodology paper is required to explain indicator selection and use, ensuring transparency and consistency.
- **Evaluation plan:** Article 35 of the Interreg Regulation mandates an evaluation plan outlining the scope, timing, responsibilities, and methods for evaluation. Impact evaluations are a central focus, with flexibility on how each specific objective is evaluated.
- **Indicators for Interreg programmes:** Article 34 of the Interreg Regulation highlights the importance of defining clear and measurable indicators to track programme progress and outcomes. These indicators must be robust, aligned with the intervention logic, and capable of capturing both short- and long-term impacts. Additionally, the selection and application of these indicators must be carefully documented in the methodology paper to ensure consistency and transparency across programmes.

### 3. Why are we discussing it?

Evaluation plays a crucial role in ensuring that Interreg programmes meet their objectives and contribute effectively to EU cohesion goals. By discussing evaluation practices, we aim to enhance understanding of how interventions are designed, assessed, and improved. The 2021–2027 period places a stronger emphasis on result-oriented evaluations, focusing on the real impact of EU investments. Evaluations help guide decision-making, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively in addressing territorial needs. This ongoing dialogue supports stakeholders in identifying best practices, overcoming challenges, and refining evaluation strategies to ensure programmes deliver meaningful results.

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

- What is a result-oriented approach and how does it relate to the theory of change?
- What is an evaluation plan and why is it important?
- How are impact evaluations carried out in Interreg?
- How can we define appropriate indicators, especially result indicators, and ensure data availability at both project and programme levels?
- How can we ensure alignment between programme and project intervention logics so that project outputs and results feed into programme-level indicators?
- How can we ensure that evaluation findings are available early enough to influence decisions, particularly during mid-term reviews or reprogramming?
- How can we address resource constraints, considering that capacity and expertise in evaluation can vary between programmes and regions?

### 5. How are they addressed? How does it work in practice?

In the 2021–2027 programming period, programme evaluation is built on a more result-oriented approach, with a clearer intervention logic and enhanced strategic planning through evaluation plans. These elements are designed to optimize programme implementation, improve performance, and demonstrate the value of EU investments.

- **Defining an intervention logic:** A key first step is to establish a result-oriented intervention logic that connects territorial needs, policy objectives, actions, and indicators. This forms the foundation for all monitoring and evaluation activities. The 2021–2027 framework prioritizes measuring outcomes and impacts, focusing resources on a smaller set of clear, targeted objectives to maximize effectiveness.
- **Evaluation plan:** The evaluation plan, prepared by the managing authority and approved by the monitoring committee, outlines the objectives, scope, responsibilities, timeline, and methods for evaluation(s). It is an essential tool throughout the programme life cycle, helping to structure

evaluations in a way that ensures timely, relevant evidence is available for programme steering and reporting.

- **Impact evaluation:** Impact evaluations focus on assessing the actual contribution of the programme to observed changes, isolating the effects of interventions from other influencing factors. Not every specific objective requires a separate impact evaluation. In cases with limited interventions, the evaluation may rely more on indicators or simplified analyses of trends. Where necessary, theory-based or counterfactual methods can be used to estimate net effects.

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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](mailto:communication@interact.eu)

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**Publisher** | Interact programme  
**Date** | 22.04.2025  
**Author** | Daniela Minichberger  
**Contributors** | Besiana Ninka, Philip Heaton



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Co-funded by  
the European Union  
Interreg