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 | Project Closure

1. What is it? What is the definition of the term / theme of this fact sheet?

Understanding of the project closure

Project closure is the last phase in the project implementation process. The focus at project closure is:

- capturing objectives, results, impacts achieved (including final reporting on the indicators),
- making sure that all expenditures have been appropriately reported (by all project partners and to the right budget line)
- ensuring proper audit trail and finalising all administrative tasks
- identifying potential for the capitalisation and synergies based on achieved results,
- preparing for post-project obligations (e.g. durability of investments, availability of documents for audits, visibility requirements)
- capturing lessons learned
- providing feedback to programme.

It is important for projects to understand that once a project is **officially closed**, the contractual relationship between the project partnership and the Managing Authority (MA) is considered complete. At this point, only post-project obligations remain.

In practice, this means:

- All expenditure has been verified and confirmed as eligible, and no new expenditure can be reported.
- Financial and administrative verifications have been finalised, and all corrective actions (if any) have been addressed.

The programmes have different ways of officially closing the projects. In some programmes the project is closed through a status change in the electronic monitoring system, some programmes send a formal closure letter from the MA to the Lead Partner.

This confirmation on project closure provides legal certainty for the partnership that the project implementation period has been concluded, and that the only obligations that remain are those defined in EU regulations (e.g. durability of operations under CPR Article 65, document availability) and programme-specific rules regarding post-project obligations.

Definition

The project closure **is not defined uniformly across programmes in the 2021–2027 period.** Two main approaches emerge:

- **Closure defined as the project end date**

  Project closure is considered as the official end date indicated in the application form. All project activities must be finalised by this date, and all costs must be incurred and paid before or latest on this date.

- **Closure defined as the period after the project end date to implement closure related activities**

  Some programmes introduce a specific closure period (usually 1–4 months after the project end date). During this period, preparation and handling of final project report, verification of costs, and administrative closure tasks are carried out. In some cases during the closure period all partners can still receive and pay invoices for the activities that have taken place during the project implementation period.

Eligibility of closure costs

The eligibility of closure costs depends on how programmes define the project closure period. If closure is defined as the project end date, no costs incurred after that date are eligible. However, if closure is considered as an additional period for finalising administrative tasks and preparing reports, approaches to cost eligibility vary considerably across programmes. Examples include:

- Costs through a lump sum, ranging from €3,000 to €13,400, to cover all expenditure related to the closure phase (administrative, project management expenses). In some cases, programmes require a dedicated work package to claim the lump sum.
- Eligibility limited to staff and administration costs (in some cases also travel cost) of the lead partner only.
- Eligibility extended to staff and administration costs (in some cases also travel cost) of the entire partnership.

2. Why are we discussing it?

Project closure is a crucial phase for both projects and programmes. Programmes need to ensure that projects close according to the EC and programme rules. If projects are not closed correctly there can be consequences for the programme and related programme bodies such as:

- The programme can't close until all of its projects are closed,
- The projects can't be closed until they have fulfilled all of the necessary requirements,
- Errors and irregularities can occur as a result of poor management of project closure.

Project closure also is a great opportunity:

- To ensure durability of project results and work on programme level activities to support capitalisation of results
- To reflect on lessons learned, highlight good practices, and disseminate achievements.

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

CPR Art. 65 Durability of operations

CPR Art. 82 Availability of documents

4. Key considerations, challenges and frequently asked questions

As programme definitions of project closure and related eligibility rules differ, approaches to communicating closure requirements and advice in guidance documents in Interreg programmes also vary. Some programmes provide extensive guidance with detailed requirements and practical advice on topics such as *eligibility of closure costs, durability of results, final reporting, communication and visibility, horizontal*

principles, lessons learnt and capitalisation. Others focus more narrowly on *final reporting and/or certain eligibility aspects, durability of investments and/or project results*.

The content provided below is based on **the main elements found in Interreg programme guidance documents on project closure**.

4.1. Final Reporting

Final reporting marks the conclusion of a project and is the key step in closing the project both administratively and financially and ensuring durability of project results.

It is a possibility to provide evidence of results, ensure accountability for EU funds, ensure visibility, capitalisation and demonstrate the long term value of the project. While the basic principles are similar across programmes, **approaches vary**: in some cases, the final report is an *extended progress report with additional closure section(s)*, while in others, it is a *standalone document* prepared in addition to regular reporting.

Requirements for Final Report Content

Most programmes require the final report to include:

- **Project achievements and results**: A summary of how objectives were met compared to the application, including outputs, outcomes, and impacts.
- **Indicators**: Final quantification of outputs and results matched against targets and providing evidence.
- **Sustainability and durability or results**: Plans for how results will be used, maintained after project end.
- **Lessons learned**: Challenges faced, solutions found, and reflections on cooperation experience.
- **Communication and dissemination**: Evidence of visibility activities, compliance with EU/publicity rules, and project story for public sharing (project results databases of programme, joint EU database such as keep.eu).
- **Financial closure**: Confirmation that all eligible expenditures were incurred and paid by the end date.

There are some fewer usual practices in relation to the final reporting:

- **Final on-the-spot visit** (IPA Bulgaria-Serbia programme) – during the project closure the Joint Secretariat conducts a final visit, approves final project progress report and verifies whether all activities have been completed according to the approved Application Form.
- **The report on DNSH and the horizontal principles** (Hungary-Slovakia programme) – the lead partner is required to prepare a report on DNSH and the horizontal principles using the template provided by the Joint Secretariat. The report must cover the following: Do No Significant Harm (DNSH, projects must demonstrate that supported measures do not cause significant negative environmental impacts), sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, gender equality.
- **Feedback survey about the programme support, procedures and practices as well as project management** after the project end date. Interreg Central Baltic programme sends out a link to the survey questionnaire via email for the lead partner and project partners aiming to get feedback to further develop support of the programme to applicants and project partners.
- **Press-release style summary** of the project achievements as part of the final report to be used for communication purposes (Interreg Hungary–Slovakia programme) or a **"Project Story"** (Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic programme) for public communication (projects are asked to describe the final achievements in a Project Story format which is interesting and understandable for non-specialists as it is meant to be automatically published on Interreg's knowledge base http://www.keep.eu).

Final Reports are generally required within **1–4 months** after the project end date, with some variations depending on the programme. In line with the lead partner principle, the lead partner is responsible for preparing and submitting the report. However, contributions from all partners are expected, particularly in providing content and reflections. The report must be discussed among partners, and where a project steering committee is foreseen, its formal approval of the final report is required.

Common Challenges Related to Final Reporting

Time pressure and underestimating administrative work. Closure periods are usually short – about 1 to 4 months. If preparation of closure activities starts late or project implementation is delayed, less time and fewer resources remain for closure. If programme guidance is late or lacks clarity, projects lack sufficient support. Key project activities are often scheduled too close to the end date, and staff time for closure is not properly planned. As a result, partnerships may struggle to deliver a high-quality final report and fulfil other closure obligations.

To support projects in delivering high-quality final reports and successfully closing projects, it is important to:

Provide clear and concise guidance
- Develop user-friendly instructions for final reporting and all other project closure requirements. It is great if they are complemented by examples and lessons learned from previous projects.
- Make these materials available well in advance so that projects can prepare on time.

Encourage early preparation
- Advice projects to agree in advance on the project responsibilities during the closure period and post project period. Important to remind that partners are less motivated to work when job agreements are finished and they are moved to the new tasks in their organisations.
- Advise projects to start gathering evidence, drafting summaries, and documenting achievements necessary for final reporting throughout implementation, not only in the last months.
- Experience shows that final reporting is smoother and more accurate when preparation starts early rather than being postponed to the final project semester.

Organise exchanges with projects
- Use programme events, webinars, or dedicated closure briefings to explain project closure and final reporting requirements and clarify expectations.
- Offer the opportunity for projects to ask questions both during implementation and again close to the project end date.

Highlight lessons learned
- Encourage projects to reflect not only on outputs and results but also on challenges faced, solutions found, and transferable practices.
- Ask to share programme-level feedback and examples to inspire continuous improvement.

By approaching final reporting as a learning and communication tool rather than a purely administrative task, programmes can help projects deliver closure outputs that are useful, credible, and contribute to long-term impact.

4.2 Durability of project results

Durability of results is stipulated as following in the EU regulation 2021/1060, article 65. The focus is placed on investments, infrastructure, or productive assets rather than on the overall durability of all project results and outputs. This approach is also reflected in many programme manuals. Wider

durability of project results – now increasingly recognised as essential in project management as well as in social and corporate responsibility – is not always equally covered in guidance documents. The way programmes address durability varies.

The examples below provide a overview of approaches in programmes to address durability of results (non-exhaustive since not all programme manuals were reviewed, and in some cases the relevant chapters were still under development when this fact sheet was prepared):

- Programmes have as a seperate **assessment criterion or as a sub questions to certain assessment criterion during the assessment to address durability of project results**. For example, Interreg Sweden-Norway programme requires applicants to demonstrate that their project will deliver visible long-term results for the priority and the border region, and that these effects will remain beneficial after Interreg support ends. Projects are expected to show relevance to their target groups, potential to generate lasting impact on the programme's vision and priorities, and capacity to ensure that cross-border cooperation or results are sustained, further developed, or formalised at project closure (other examples: Danube Region Interreg programme, part of the strategic assessment criteria for target groups/durability and transferability/horizontal principles).

- Interreg Alpine Space programme presents the durability and transferability of results as one of the required features to quality projects. The emphasis is put on the long-term use of the project results and the expected impact therefore a strategy how to involve target groups in all project implementation phases is required.

- The Interreg Aurora Programme requires all projects to prepare an **exit strategy** as part of their application form. It should describe how the project will ensure that its activities and **results are sustained after the project end**. Projects are expected to clarify which results should be maintained, what roles and responsibilities stakeholders will assume after closure, and how capacity will be built to continue operations. The exit strategy is expected to be developed jointly with partners from the outset, revisited during implementation, and adjusted as the project evolves. By planning for continuity early, projects are better positioned to embed changes into permanent structures, hand results over to stakeholders, or inspire future initiatives.

- The Interreg Danube Region Programme places strong emphasis on **capitalisation as a key tool to strengthen the durability of project results**, complementing the requirement for investment durability presented in the Programme Manual. Projects are encouraged to cooperate both within the programme and externally with projects from other programmes. As a result, capitalisation activities are expected to improve the quality, visibility, and sustainability of outputs. The starting point is the Applicants' Guide where clear expectations for ensuring that project outputs durability are explained.

- Interreg North West Europe programme highlights the long-term durability of outputs and results as a **core expectation for all projects and presenting this together with guidance for the workplan:** "All projects are expected to plan and implement activities that will ensure the replication and roll-out of their outputs and results... It is not compulsory to have an activity on long-term effects in each work package, but applicants must **strategically plan long-term effects activities when designing their work plans** (e.g., at crucial milestones of the project)."

- Northern Periphery and Arctic programme highlights five key practices to secure project legacy after closure: **5 tips for securing project legacy and for a long term effect.**
  1. Projects must comply with EU visibility and publicity requirements to ensure transparency and avoid penalties.
  2. Prepare your website for long-term - update to reflect closure, highlight achievements, and provide accessible outputs, factsheets, and final media products.
  3. Tidy up your project outputs: Project outputs and resources are valuable and should be easily available to interested organisations to be used, reused and adapted and advice on that is provided.
  4. Review online presence in beneficiaries' webpages and external project websites must be reviewed to meet the mandatory EU requirements, highlight the project's achievements and guide visitors to the mini-website to find all relevant information and materials.

5. Keep spreading the word: projects are encouraged to keep promoting their work after closure by reusing outputs, engaging at events, tagging partners, and informing the programme about follow-up developments.

Challenges to observe durability requirements

Durability of results is treated and guidance provided in quite various ways. One of the reasons is that CPR puts more emphasis on the investment part, therefore general durability and sustainability of project results is sometimes assumed to be self-evident or left to the judgement of experienced practitioners.

Yet, **there are strong reasons for programmes to provide clear and explicit guidance,** such as:

- Defining what durability means, how it should be demonstrated, and how it will be verified also creates legal and audit clarity, reducing risks of disputes or misunderstandings.

- A unified approach and guidance encourage projects to plan for durability from the start.

- Projects have the different capacity or experience in embedding durability, and without clear instructions results may be poorly finalised or even abandoned. Finally, more explicit guidance aligns Interreg practice with international project management standards, where sustainability of results (in our case durability term is used) is now considered a core dimension of project quality and success. For these reasons, stronger guidance on durability is not only useful but increasingly essential practice.

4.3. Capitalisation and visibility: project closure as a bridge to long-term impact

The closure phase is the moment to convert results into lasting value: make achievements visible, accessible, and ready to serve target groups beyond Interreg funding as we covered earlier. At project level, closure should evidence how durability was planned from the start, confirm stakeholder ownership, and operationalise what was prepared during implementation (refine outputs into user-friendly formats, engage priority users and policy-makers, and publish clear final stories and materials on programme/project websites and shared databases). Closure events can also connect with "uptakers" and encourage reuse.

At **programme level**, closure should trigger **capitalisation practices**:

- cluster similar projects and curate results around shared themes;

- identify outputs with policy or market relevance and connect them to decision-makers and users;

- run targeted capitalisation calls or activities;

- maintain searchable project/result databases;

- link results to macro-regional/sea-basin strategies and cooperate with other funds/instruments.

When done well, capitalisation makes outputs easier to find, **replicate or integrate into policy and practice**, allowing others to build on success, make achievements available easily accessible via joint database for wider audience www.keep.eu, www.interrreg.eu. Strategic, well-executed **final communication and visibility measures** are therefore not the last chore but important part towards legacy, replication, and broader reach. For more information on capitalisation please consult fact sheet on Knowledge management and capitalisation in Interreg.

4.4. Retention of documents after project closure

Programmes include guidance on responsibilities of beneficiaries to keep a complete audit trail of the project. In line with CPR Article 82, all supporting documents (such as invoices, procurement files, contracts, accounts, reports, and evidence of outputs) must be retained for a minimum of five years, starting from 31 December of the year in which the MA made the final payment to the lead partner . This period may be interrupted in the case of legal proceedings or at the request of the European Commission. The Managing Authority usually informs the lead partner of the exact start date of this retention period, and the lead partner must pass this information on to all project partners. Quite often it is done by sending the Closure letter to the lead partner. Some programmes apply stricter requirements,

asking for documents to be kept for up to seven years after formal project closure, or longer if required by national rules.

Documents may be stored as originals, certified copies, or electronic versions depending on programme requirements, but partners must clearly document their location. This obligation applies to all projects, including those using simplified cost options. Throughout the retention period, all competent authorities (MA, JS, audit bodies, EC) must have access to the project documentation to verify eligibility and ensure a proper audit trail.

Some programmes provide example list of the documents which must be retained after the project closure.

4.5. Post project obligations

To reinforce programme objectives on the durability of results, impact, and capitalisation, several Interreg programmes have introduced **post-project obligations**. These measures help track the long-term use of results, capture risks, and continue the learning process even after project closure. The examples include:

- **Annual durability reports** – Lead partners must submit yearly reports for projects with infrastructure and/or equipment investments during the five-year sustainability period after the final payment (Interreg Aurora programme). Joint Secretariats may also carry out ex-post visits to verify it.

- **Result indicator follow-up** – In the Central Baltic programme, Managing Authority request a report on result indicators one year after project closure and send a survey on durability and follow-up activities to monitor achievements.

- **On-the-spot durability verifications** – In the Poland–Slovakia programme, at least 10% of completed investment projects are checked through risk-based sampling. Controllers conduct verifications in the third to fifth year after the final payment, ensuring compliance with durability rules and provide data to the Managing Authority.

- **Post project interview –** The Estonia–Latvia Programme used to carry out *impact interviews* with project teams about one year after closure. The objective was to bring together all partners to reflect on achievements, challenges, and post-project developments, with particular attention to the durability of results, continuation of cooperation, and organisational change. Each meeting concluded with a short video capturing partner reflections, later used in programme communication.

Introducing post-project obligations ensures that projects get clear message about importance of project results durability and projects are required to continue to deliver value beyond their lifetime, while also providing programmes with evidence to refine their support. These practices should be further developed to enhance the legacy of Interreg investments.

5. Concluding remarks

The closure phase of an Interreg project is the decisive moment when the full value of the cooperation becomes visible. Just as a strong start-up phase lays the foundations for quality, relevance, and durability of results, a well-managed closure ensures that achievements are safeguarded, obligations are respected, and legacies are secured.

From the analysis of programme practices, project closure is not understood or implemented in a uniform way across Interreg. Definitions, procedures, and eligibility rules vary. This diversity reflects the flexibility, but it also highlights to a certain degree a need for clearer terminology, greater harmonisation, and in some cases more forward-looking guidance to help projects navigate this critical phase.

There are many positive trends: programmes are increasingly attentive to the durability of results, capitalisation of knowledge, and visibility of achievements. They are exploring innovative and various ways to ensure results are more accessible and engaging to a wider audience. At the same time, projects themselves are becoming more aware of their responsibility to sustain results, engage stakeholders, and contribute to broader synergies. With some strengthening efforts from programme side to support projects we can further develop project closure as a launch moment for the impact rather than an administrative end.

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