Operational Evaluation of Interact Programme

16 January, 2026

Final Report

Acronyms and abbreviations

AA	Audit Authority
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CPR	Common provisions regulation
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European groupings of territorial cooperation
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
FIN	Finance/ control/ audit group
HIT	Harmonised Implementation Tools
HoI	Hosting Institution
HR	Human resources
IO	Interact Office
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IS	Interact Secretariat
IT	Information Technology
Jems	Joint electronic monitoring system
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MRS	Macro-regional Strategies
NEXT	Neighbourhood External
OSI	Operations of strategic importance
PM	Programme management group
SFC	System for Fund Management in the EU
TA	Technical Assistance

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Operational Evaluation of Interact Programme

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

The Operational Evaluation of the Interact IV Programme (2021–2027) was commissioned to assess its effectiveness, efficiency, and communication strategy. The Programme supports European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) by strengthening the capacity of institutions that manage and implement EU cohesion policy investments. Its role is primarily as a service provider, offering tools, training, and platforms that facilitate cooperation, harmonisation, and capacity building across Member States, candidate countries, and neighbouring regions.

The evaluation covered the period from the programme's approval in July 2022 through the end of 2024, with additional data up to mid-2025. It focused on three core tasks/ areas:

- progress toward achievement of programme objectives and indicators
- effectiveness and efficiency of programme management, and
- implementation and performance of the Communication Strategy.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing document review, surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus group to gather and analyse both primary and secondary data.

Key Findings

1. Achievement of Programme Objectives

Interact IV seeks to strengthen governance in European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) by building the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders. The Programme has demonstrated solid implementation progress, as partly evidenced by performance indicators where participation in joint actions has surpassed targets. Although, two output indicators have not met the 2024 milestones, Interact IV is gaining stronger momentum compared to the previous cycle and remains well-positioned to achieve its long-term objectives. While some inconsistencies in the formulation of overall and specific objectives across programme documents caused an ambiguity, the strategic direction remains clear and consistently upheld. The Programme's specific objective is monitored through one intermediate and two result indicators, though a more streamlined definition could improve clarity and enhance effectiveness.

Based on the results of the Interact Use and satisfaction survey, high rates of satisfaction do not suggest any need to re-focus the activities of the Programme. The Programme provides a diverse array of tailored services, such as events, advisory support and digital tools, that are generally well received. A targeted Evaluation survey reconfirmed the strong overall relevance of Interact's services; the ratings varied by professional background and programme affiliations. This survey findings show that professional roles shape perceptions of Interact's services, with stakeholders in communication and finance positions valuing different tools. The results also show strong overall approval of Interact's delivery methods, with no reported

dissatisfaction, though feedback highlights the need for clearer digital platforms, more flexible formats, and tailored support to meet diverse programme needs and operational constraints.

2. Programme Management

Interact is a long-standing EU-funded Programme that offers assistance to stakeholders involved in implementing programmes under the European Territorial Cooperation objective of the cohesion policy. Unlike standard TA programmes, it operates through four offices in different countries, each governed by distinct national rules, adding complexity to its structure. United by a shared mission, the offices face challenges in coordination and personnel management due to differing labour conditions and administrative practices across Hosting Institutions. Beneath its seemingly flat hierarchy, Interact's management is informal and multifaceted, with overlapping responsibilities and high individual autonomy, highlighting the need for clearer governance. It is using a hybrid management model that combines flexible, adaptive teamwork with structured oversight. Despite these challenges, Interact functions as a strong network, delivering useful services and adapting to diverse needs.

The Managing Authority fulfils managerial and coordination role supported by the Interact Secretariat and Horizontal Managers. Operationally, the Coordination Board facilitates cooperation and service alignment across offices. The financial management is widely recognised for its efficiency, formalising certain aspects, particularly around governance clarity and role definition, could help address persistent decision-making challenges more effectively.

Interact plays a pivotal role in the shared management of Interreg programmes alongside the European Commission, providing tools, expertise, and coordination that facilitate strategic planning and regulatory dialogue across territorial cooperation initiatives. While programme performance is closely monitored through predefined indicators and detailed reporting, the current monitoring process is time-intensive, signalling the need for more advanced IT solutions. Interact plays a key role in supporting the European Commission by aligning its Work Plan with EU priorities, acting as a bridge to Interreg programmes and other stakeholders.

Interact encourages programme involvement in developing tools and services. The actual participation levels vary across target groups, with half of programmes actively engaged. Interact has transitioned from its originally region-specific operations to a more flexible, cross-office collaboration model that balances regional stakeholder engagement with specialised expertise across its offices. Service development is informed by a combination of internal and external feedback methods, though the process for consistently reporting and integrating feedback findings remains an area for improvement.

3. Communication Strategy

Interact's communication strategy underpins its core objectives of cooperation governance, institutional capacity-building, and visibility. It prioritizes knowledge sharing, stakeholder engagement, and the promotion of tools and services. While flagship initiatives and digital platforms have broadened outreach, delays in IT rollouts reveal a gap between strategic ambition and operational execution. In March 2025, Interact adopted a Microsoft-based IT

system with improved features like automatic event registration and shared logins, yet integration across platforms and effective knowledge management remain ongoing challenges.

Interact's communication strategy is positively perceived, with tools such as the Newsflash and Interreg Day standing out for their strong visibility and relevance. The recent website redesign reflects a proactive response to usability needs and signals a commitment to continuous improvement. Evaluation findings confirm the effectiveness of key tools like Newsflash, while also highlighting opportunities to tailor communication more closely to diverse audience preferences. Enhancing audience segmentation, refining survey design, and strengthening data sharing practices would further increase the relevance and impact of Interact's outreach efforts.

Conclusions

Findings indicate that Interact IV is progressing well toward its goals, with planned outputs broadly aligned with stakeholder needs. The observed ambiguity in how objectives and indicators are formulated across programme documents provides space for refinement in future programming. Adjustments to indicators could support more effective result measurement. Survey responses reflect high satisfaction and perceived relevance of services, though terminology-related interpretation issues persist. The surveys point to limited flexibility in Interact Academy's training formats and suggest that declining response rates call for more focused and tailored outreach efforts. Providing feedback on how survey responses are addressed could further strengthen stakeholder trust and engagement.

Interact's resilient and flexible service delivery remains strong despite internal challenges stemming from its multi-employer structure and fragmented administrative systems. While its skilled workforce drives high-quality outputs, unclear hierarchies and overlapping authority figures complicate coordination, decision-making, and performance assessment. Despite its complex hybrid structure and multi-employer setup, the Interact Programme continues to deliver high-quality services through resilient teams and strong cross-office collaboration. To maintain cohesion and support effective cross-border collaboration, clearer governance rules, streamlined procedures, are essential to balance flexibility and accountability. If left unaddressed, internal ambiguities in roles, governance and human resource practices, pose risks to staff well-being and long-term operational coherence, especially under growing demands and potential budget constraints. Strengthening internal procedures, clarifying responsibilities, and enhancing stakeholder engagement mechanisms will be key to sustaining Interact's strategic relevance, service quality, and digital innovation.

The surveys confirmed strong stakeholder approval for communication formats and visibility, though the website received the lowest ratings and has since been redesigned. Preferences vary by professional role, with Newsflash widely favoured and social media showing limited relevance, suggesting a need for more audience-specific outreach. Better feedback quality could be ensured by clearer survey terminology and guidance, as current ambiguities could lead to off-topic responses. Interact's surveys offer only partial insights due to selection bias, unclear terminology, and limited representativeness. The lack of comprehensive analysis and feedback sharing weakens their strategic value and unclear reasons for low engagement among some programmes highlight the need for targeted dialogue and support. Combining

European Commission insights with improved feedback mechanisms could foster more inclusive and effective service delivery.

Lessons Learned

- Consistent formulation of objectives across programme documentation is essential.
- Consolidating result indicators into a single, comprehensive metric can better capture final outcomes.

Recommendations

- Introduce more flexible training formats and schedules in Interact Academy.
- Improve survey design: simplify structure, target outreach effectively, and ensure feedback is shared, apply simplified surveys broadly and use detailed surveys for newly introduced services.
- Strengthen Interact's governance and human resource systems by formalising and applying internal procedures that establish clear roles, tasks, responsibilities, and performance standards to ensure coherence, efficiency and resilience of the Programme.
- Utilise the new IT platform to implement a knowledge management system, support real-time monitoring and strengthen reporting functions.
- Expand and prepare the Glossary of Interact specific terms to improve clarity and shared understanding.
- Actively engage programmes that are currently underrepresented.

1. Evaluation purpose and methodology

1.1 Background

Interact as part of Interregional Programmes is ensuring exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building among cooperation actors. It contributes to achieving the goal of the European Territorial Cooperation by building administrative capacity for the institutions and stakeholders managing the Cohesion Policy investments in Interreg programmes. As one of interregional programmes it functions as service organisation striving for meeting clients' needs and anticipating future needs.

Interact IV was designed to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy by promoting exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building. This should eventually contribute to harmonisation and simplification of Interreg programmes' implementation and/or cooperation actions as well as to the capitalisation of their results; moreover, it should also support the set-up, functioning and use of European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTCs). Interact IV builds on the successful implementation of the previous programming periods.

Interreg programmes under the European Territorial Cooperation all over the Europe are implementing projects to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion among the EU Member States, third countries, candidate and neighbouring countries as per the objectives of the Cohesion Policy. Their results contribute to improving the lives of EU inhabitants. Over the past 20 years Interact thus helps the Interreg programmes, and other actors working in a cooperation context, to ensure more efficient and more effective use of EU funds. This has been achieved through offering targeted interventions - events, publications and tools to address the key challenges of the programmes and cooperation actors.

The geographical area targeted by Interact services includes all Member States, Norway and Switzerland. In addition, the programme supports cooperation at the external borders of the European Union (Interreg-IPA CBC and, Interreg NEXT).

Interact is a decentralised organisation with a horizontal team structure. The Interact Managing Authority and Interact Secretariat is hosted by the Bratislava Self Governing Region. Besides that, partnership agreements establish four implementing offices located in Turku (Finland), Valencia (Spain), Viborg (Denmark) and Vienna (Austria) pooling experiences, innovations and ideas from all over Europe. Each office is responsible for the management of specific projects and contributes to the overall knowledge and implementation of the programme. Interreg specialists work across offices and topics, to build a broad understanding of the challenges facing Interreg programmes and design interventions to address them. The team comprises some 55 individuals working in various groups across offices, supporting and providing Interact services.

1.2 Objective and scope of the evaluation

The operational evaluation is carried out with the aim to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme implementation and management, including the evaluation of the programme's Communication Strategy.

The evaluation covers whole Interact IV programme from the approval in July 2022 till the cut-off date, that is end of 2024 (in relation to the milestones set out for the indicators) while other information can cover the period till the end of June 2025. The Interact programme bodies will be the main target audience of the conclusions deriving from this evaluation.

The operational evaluation should assist mainly the Monitoring Committee (MC), Managing Authority (MA)/ Interact Secretariat (IS) and Interact Offices (IOs) to gain better understanding of the programme implementation and management, of the progress in achieving the programme objectives, suitability of the Interact management system, and soundness of the Communication Strategy. The evaluation is expected to provide evidence of what works and what does not work, thus enabling informed programme decisions on the basis of the evaluation findings. This includes observations and suggestions to consider by the programme bodies when deciding on the Interact strategy and its set-up in the period post 2027.

1.3 Evaluation tasks and questions

The Terms of Reference of the evaluation set out three tasks:

- Task 1: Evaluation of the progress towards achievement of the programme objectives and its indicators;
- Task 2: Evaluation of the programme management system;
- Task 3: Evaluation of the Communication Strategy and progress in its implementation.

These tasks should provide answers to the main evaluation question:

- Is the programme implementation well on track for achieving the programme objectives?
- Is the programme management system designed and used in an effective and efficient way in order to allow reaching the programme objectives?
- What is the progress in the implementation of the Interact communication strategy and achievement of the communication objectives?

The questions were further specified in the Terms of Reference and the full list of the evaluation tasks, questions and sub-questions is in Annex 1.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Tools for the data collection and data analysis

To analyse the efficiency and effectiveness of Interact's implementation, management and communication, several standard methodological tools and instruments were used. All of the evaluation questions (and sub-questions) are descriptive; therefore, the non-experimental

evaluation design was applied. Mixed research methods and tools integrate benefits of both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches and these were used to answer specified evaluation (sub)questions.

The initial **desk review/ study** helped to assemble secondary data from variety of sources. Official documents were provided and numerous other documents and reports were publicly available at the Interact web page. Further data were gained from the monitoring system and Interact's surveys.

Collection of the primary data was mainly carried out through **24 semi-structured interviews** with the relevant stakeholders. Interviews combined a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity to explore particular themes or responses further and adapted questions based on the interviewee's responses during the conversation.

Four group interviews and a focus group complemented the findings from the desk study. This tool was utilised to collect primary information from relevant stakeholders where a few people were interviewed or when the opinions and views of a group of people on specific topics were necessary. Interviews were the main sources of information in all three tasks. Focus groups were used to discuss potential impact, recommended measures and lessons learned as well as future direction of Interact.

Survey, specifically desiged for evaluation purposes aimed to capture the opinions of a broad population by reaching a large and diverse sample. Given the high number of potential respondents and the difficulty of targeting individuals directly, it was decided to distribute the survey via the Newsflash. This approach allowed a wider audience to access the survey and self-select participation based on relevance. The accompanying announcement provided sufficient context for individuals to determine whether they were the intended recipients. As a result, instead of pre-targeting specific respondent groups, participants themselves identified which categories they belonged to, enabling segmented analysis of the results. Nonetheless, the overall response rate and population representativeness remain uncertain, largely due to ambiguity around the definition of the total target population. While this method broadened outreach and improved accessibility, it also brought ambiguity in determining size of the population and thus the statistical representativeness of the sample[1].

As Interact carried out Use and satisfaction survey (hereinafter referred to as Use and satisfaction survey) and Needs assessment (hereinafter referred to as Needs assessment), the existing data collected by these surveys were provided and information were analysed and processed in the report.

The data collection phase applying the above-mentioned tools ensured collection of all necessary data and information. The triangulation of data collection sources and applied tools ensured reliability and validity of data.

[1] With a total of 266 responses, the Evaluation survey achieves statistical representativeness for a population of 900 respondents, meeting a 95% confidence level with a 5-percentage-point margin of error

As regards the analytical methods, data analysis techniques, such as comparative analysis, descriptive statistics and content analysis were suitable to process the collected data and information. Comparative analysis was used to identify differences, mostly comparing baseline and achieved indicators or other relevant values. Surveys we analysed with the help of descriptive statistics.

1.5 Sources of data

The main information sources comprised documents gathered at the programme level, as well as internal documents and data regularly collected by Interact as part of the programme implementation and monitoring. These sources offered secondary data and were the basis of the desk review together with publicly available literature mostly from the online sources (social media, web pages, etc.). The available data and information stored in the shared folder included data collected by surveys on stakeholder Needs assessment[2] and survey on Use and satisfaction[3], event evaluation forms, stakeholders' contacts as well as programme implementation and communication documents.

The main stakeholders/ target groups representing the main source of the primary data are the members of the Interact management, i.e. staff of the Managing Authority (MA)/ Interact Secretariat (IS), all Interact Offices (IOs), Horizontal Managers, and members of the Monitoring Committee (MC). In addition to consultations with the MA, discussions were held with representatives of the Hosting Institutions, Horizontal Managers of the Interact Programme, and Interreg programme representatives participating in the Monitoring Committee. Interviews with European Commission officials also served as a valuable source of information. As requested in the Terms of Reference to answer some of the sub-questions on the use of Interact services, the evaluation survey was carried out (thereafter referred as Evaluation survey). Besides Interreg programmes it included bodies working on Macro-regional Strategies (MRS), Sea basin strategies, bodies performing accounting function, Audit Authorities (AAs), controllers, National Contact Points, EGTC, EC representatives, and programmes who use Interact services less frequently, such as IPA and Interreg NEXT programmes.

[2] Needs assessment was distributed to all MA and JTS of 86 programmed in the middle of 2024, the feedback contained 16 responses

[3] Use and satisfaction survey was conducted by Interact in January 2025, covering activities from 2023 and 2024, the sample included 33 programmes and 20 responses were provided by the MA and JS

2. Findings

2.1 Task 1

Is the programme implementation well on track for achieving the programme objectives?

2.1.1 Achievement of Programme indicators

The programme document states the overall goal of Interact IV programme as *A better Cooperation Governance* and specific objective is determined as *to enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders (all strands)*. The operational objectives (perspectives) include three groups of activities entitled: i) increasing efficiency, ii) enabling individuals, and iii) Interreg visibility.

The performance framework document[4] identifies the overall goal of the Interact IV programme as *to support better cooperation governance by means of enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders for effective implementation of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actions*, merging overall and specific objectives together. Although this ultimately aligns the programme logic in the same direction, it introduces confusion due to inconsistent definitions and wording of the specific and overall objectives across various Programme documents.

The indicators are selected in line with the objectives. Operational objectives i) - iii) (perspectives) are reflected in three output indicators chosen from the list of common Interreg indicators, specified in the methodology[1]:

- ✓ *Participations in joint actions across borders* captures the participations to joint actions that have a cross border character as they involve representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders working across borders (target groups);
- ✓ *Participations in joint training schemes* captures participations to joint training schemes implemented by Interact IV; and
- ✓ *Jointly developed solutions* counting the joint solutions provided by Interact IV that are produced with the engagement of representatives of target groups (see Annex 2).

Interact has made significant progress in its implementation although the achievement of the output indicators varies when comparing the achieved numbers with milestones planned at the end of 2024 (see Table 1). While the number of participants in joint actions was substantially exceeded, two remaining indicators did not reach the planned milestone. By the end of 2024, 60% of milestone achievement was recorded in the number of participants in joint training schemes.

Training activities are conducted under the umbrella of the Interact Academy. While the Academy has been well-received by many, especially following the pandemic, which paved the way for more accessible online formats, its initial uptake has been somewhat uneven.

[4] Methodology for establishing the Interact IV performance framework

Launched in October 2023, the Academy introduced a new service offering short courses, certified trainings, and comprehensive certified programmes. By the end of 2023, it had delivered one training session, followed by nine online events and two in situ trainings throughout 2024. The delayed rollout was primarily caused by the time required to recruit new staff, prepare training materials, and resolve technical challenges related to the IT platform. The Academy represented a new tool introduced alongside several other innovations, making it challenging to predict demand and user expectations. The training sessions demanded careful scheduling and planning on the part of participants, who had to manage their professional responsibilities. Therefore, namely the certified trainings proved to be less flexible and more time demanding, which resulted in lower number of participants. The number of participants has been steadily increasing throughout 2025. By the end of April 2025, the number of participants reached nearly 600 with nearly 500 certificates awarded.

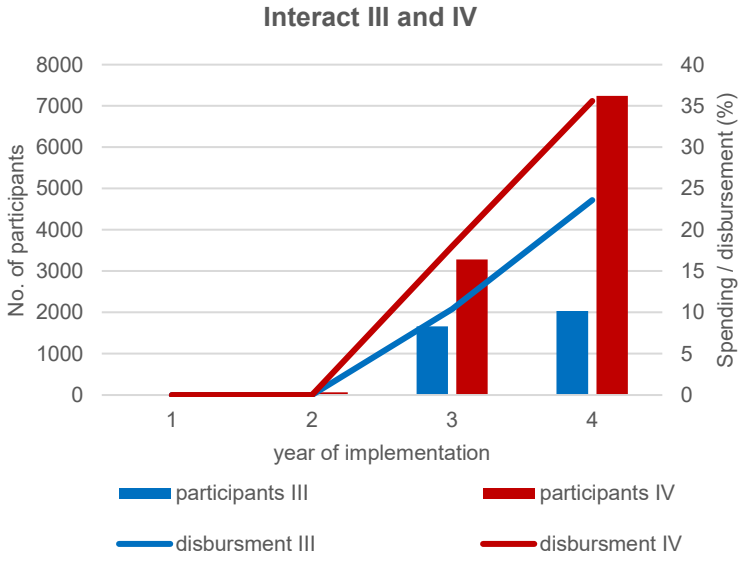
Table 1 Interact indicators

Indicator	Milestone 31.12.2024	Achieved 31.12.2024	Achieved (%)	Target 2029	Achieved (%)
(O) Participations in joint actions across borders	4 590	7 247	157,9	17 850	40,6
(O) Participations in joint training schemes	612	367	59,9	2380	15,4
(O) Jointly developed solutions	90	72	80,0	350	25,7
(R) Completion of joint training schemes	-	291	-	2 009	14,5
(R) Institutions using knowledge/skills acquired through Interact services	-	-	-	70%	-
(R) Institutions using solutions developed through Interact services	-	-	-	70%	-

Source: authors, based on data provided by Interact; O-output, R-result

Similarly, the output indicator measuring the number of jointly developed solutions reached approximately 80% of its set milestone. Since this was a newly introduced metric, there was no baseline data available to accurately project a target value. Moreover, the definition of a jointly developed solution encompassed a broad spectrum, from simple outputs like a single brochure to more complex deliverables such as advanced IT systems, exemplified by Jems.

Graph 1 Comparison of number of participants and proportion of disbursement during the first four years of implementation for Interact III and Interact IV Programmes



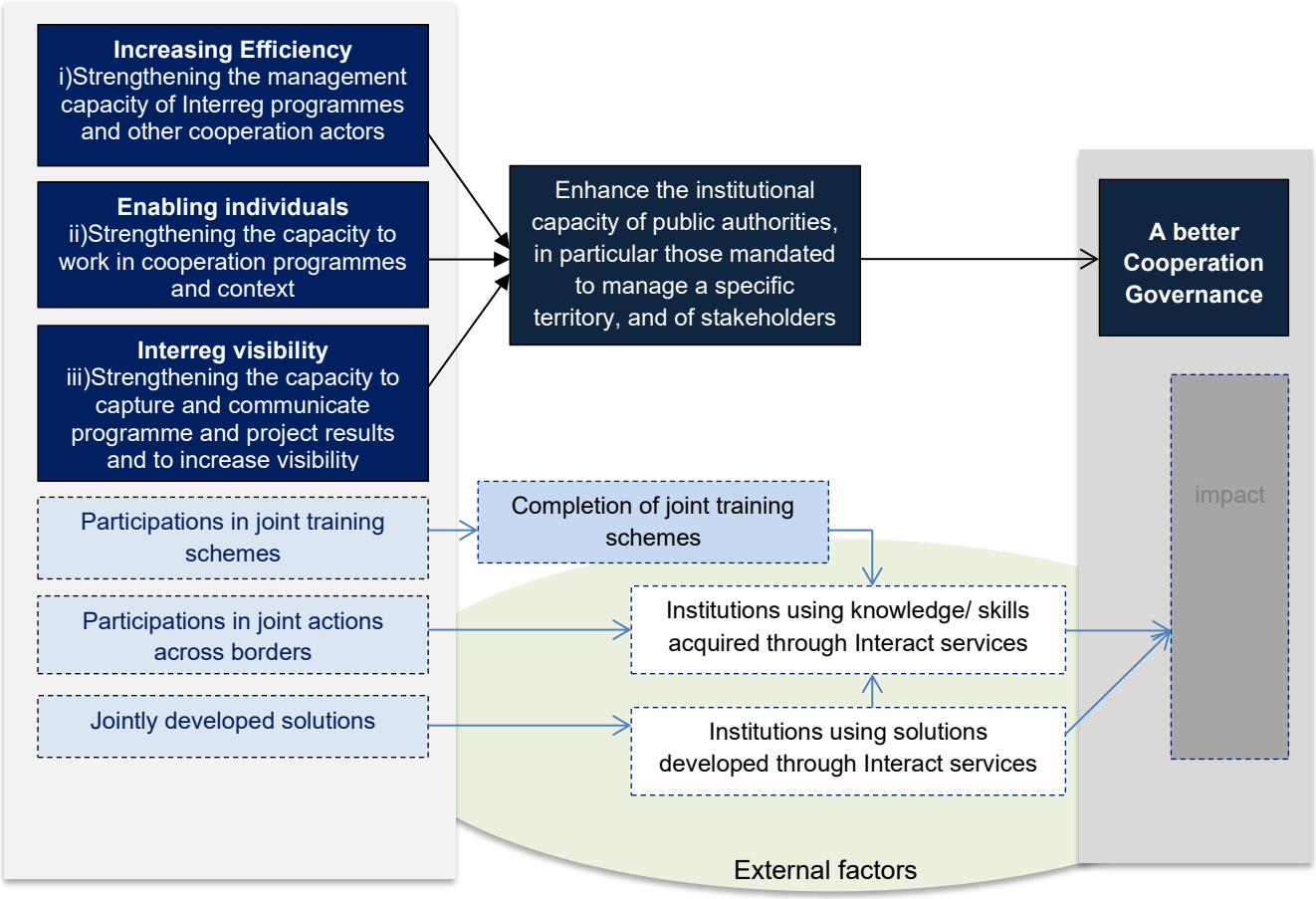
Source: authors, based on data provided by Interact

A tentative comparison with the previous Interact III programme can be made for one specific output indicator - the number of participants in joint actions. Although the figures are limited to "*joint actions*" and early implementation years generally reflect slower progress, Graph 1 illustrates that Interact IV is currently moving at a more robust pace. This trend indicates a strong likelihood of achieving the final targets.

Monitoring of Interact's output indicators is generally manageable, though still somewhat time-consuming due to the need for manual verification of data submitted by Interact Offices. While the Jems system has significantly simplified programme-level monitoring for target groups, it is not applicable to Interact itself. However, recent introduction of new IT platform including registration and other tools presents an opportunity to connect the monitoring framework more closely with mandatory reporting requirements - potentially streamlining processes and reducing administrative burden.

The achievement of the Programme's specific objective (its result/ outcome) is measured using one common result indicator (*completion of joint training schemes*) and two result indicators specific to Interact. However, the common result indicator, that was obligatory and had to be selected from the set of pre-defined EC indicators, is linked to an output indicator that tracks participation in joint training schemes. It does not fully align with Interact's specific objective (see Picture 1). As such, it can be considered an intermediate indicator that contributes to both of Interact's specific result indicators. Due to its ongoing relevance, this indicator is monitored regularly throughout the Programme's implementation. In contrast, the two result/ outcome indicators are assessed using qualitative surveys, only after the Programme concludes.

Picture 1 Logic chain and the respective indicators

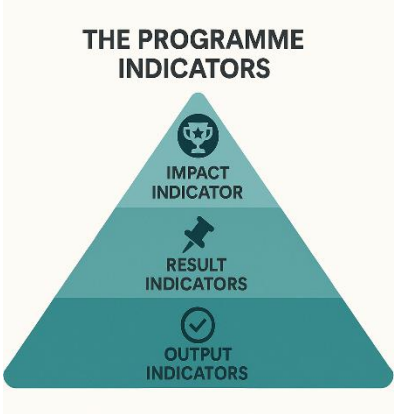


Source: authors

The intended result is to strengthen Interreg programmes that apply the knowledge, skills, or developed solutions, and to improve the governance of these programmes and other stakeholders. This should materialise in better programme management: more effective processes, clearer procedures, stronger cross-border collaboration, improved communication of results, and increased visibility of Interreg. The enhanced institutional capacity of assisted programmes should ultimately be demonstrated through determined indicators that measure the *use of knowledge/skills* and the *use of jointly developed solutions*. However, survey responses[5] that have been collected by Interact often show similar answers across more different questions. The distinction between *knowledge/skills* and *solutions* in the context of service delivery remains unclear even if the person is familiar with the Programme (see Annex 4). Therefore, it is likely to expect that the result indicators measured after the completion of Interact could provide similar values as respondents may find it difficult to differentiate between these terms.

In addition to ensuring the use of clear terminology, the core principles of intervention logic determine the number of indicators defined at each level. This structure typically resembles a pyramid, with the highest number of indicators at the output level and fewer at the impact level. The key challenge, however, is striking the right balance: there must be enough indicators to capture meaningful change, but not so many that they dilute focus or become a burden for reporting.

Picture 2 Programme indicators



Impact indicators, in particular, are more difficult to measure as they are shaped by numerous external influences. They are generally fewer in number and more strategic in scope. The overall success of Interact could be evaluated through the performance of the supported Interreg programmes, while also considering that these programmes vary significantly in their needs, size, experience, and other characteristics. Possible quantitative impact-level indicators might include project processing times, error rates, or the degree of cooperation among programmes, depending on what is considered the strategic priority/ aim and what can be measured.

Assessing the impact of Interact remains a complex task, given that its core role is to foster stronger cooperation and connection among programmes. These intangible benefits, such as enhanced collaboration and knowledge exchange, have indeed been achieved, though they are not easily quantifiable. True cooperation isn't just about working side by side, it's about mutual support, shared learning, and trust. If people feel safe to ask for help or admit uncertainty, that's a strong sign of healthy cooperation. Interact achieved this.

Outside the Interreg community, EU programmes do not appear to benefit from a robust or well-integrated network. Compelling support for this claim can be found in the current REGIOSTARS Awards 2025, an annual competition run by the European Commission that celebrates outstanding EU-funded projects in regional development. Remarkably, 8 of the 25

[5] Evaluators worked with results of two Interact surveys: Use and satisfaction survey, conducted in January 2025 and needs Assessment Survey, conducted in 2024.

finalists selected by the jury were Interreg projects, despite Interreg accounting for just 2.4% of the total Cohesion Policy budget .

2.1.2 Focus of the Programme

Interact offers a wide range of activities. In the Programme documents the activities are mixed with the outputs and further often presented or reported as services, tools, actions, events, products, strategic tools and strategic operations and/or operations of strategic importance (OSI)[6]. Many of these are delivered in multiple formats and through various methods and channels (see Annex 2). The activities include conferences, seminars, and workshops (both in-person and online), advisory services and tailor-made support, peer-to-peer exchange visits, meetings for sharing experiences or aligning approaches, expert and thematic exchange networks, trainings (in-person, online), blended learning courses offered through an online learning platform, and liaison with the European Commission (EC). Interact also fosters connections with actors involved in managing and implementing cooperation frameworks and instruments, tests innovative management and programme setup concepts, and facilitates joint promotional campaigns under Interreg.

While the scope raises no objections, the terminology would benefit from greater clarity to avoid potential misunderstandings. There is a persistent lack of clarity regarding what constitutes an activity and what is generated output (in the logframe), and how these outputs are classified as services, tools, or products, since the terminology is often used interchangeably. Additionally, distinguishing between various communication-related terms such as methods, approaches, measures, actions, and flows proves challenging, as several concepts appear to be described by multiple overlapping labels, further complicating interpretation.

All activities are officially documented in the Work Plan, which is prepared semi-annually. Proposals for activities are developed by the staff based on their experience, feedback from target groups, anticipated legislative developments, needs assessments, and internal discussions among Interact staff. The proposals are reviewed by the Coordination Board and subsequently approved by the Monitoring Committee. Once endorsed, the Work Plan remains adaptable to accommodate emerging trends and evolving needs.

Interact's activities aim to strengthen: programme management capacity, capacity to operate within cooperation programmes, and communication and visibility skills. These services are generally uniform across all three capacity areas and support both individual and organizational capabilities, which are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Interact functions primarily as a one-stop-shop for Interreg programmes, that is the main target group. It also serves other stakeholders such as Macro-regional Strategies (MRS), Sea-basin strategies (SBS), bodies performing accounting functions, Audit Authorities, controllers, National Contact Points, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), European Commission (EC) representatives, and programmes that engage less frequently with Interact,

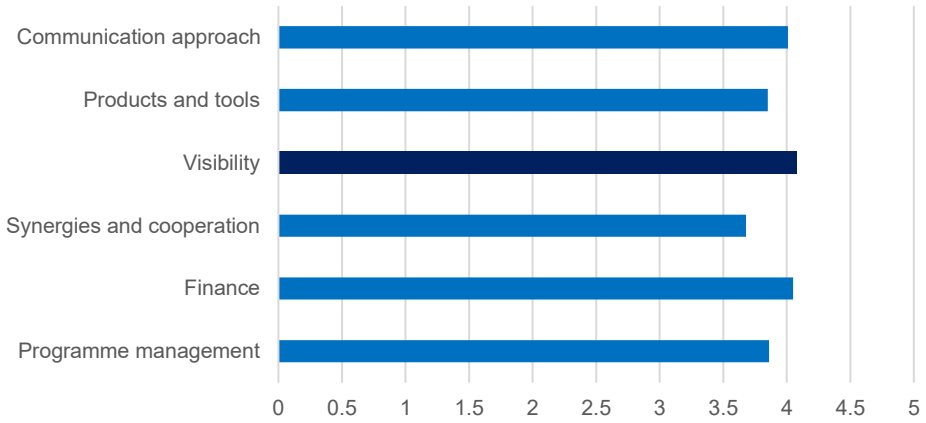
[6] Operation of strategic importance means an operation which provides a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of a programme and which is subject to particular monitoring and communication measures, as defined in Article 2(5) CPR1.

including Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and Neighbourhood External (NEXT). Activities are tailored to match the programmes' life cycle.

To find out how satisfied are users of services/tool provided by the Programme, the Use and satisfaction survey was conducted by Interact in January 2025, covering activities from 2023 and 2024 (for details see Annex 4, hereinafter referred as Use and satisfaction survey). For survey purposes of Interact, the activities were grouped under broad categories such as Products/tools, Visibility, and OSI, although there are occasional overlaps between categories. The sample included 33 programmes (including mainly Interreg programmes and a few IPA and NEXT programmes, MRS and Sea-basin strategies) and 20 responses were provided by the Managing Authorities (MA) or Joint Secretariats of the programmes.

Several questions concerning satisfaction of stakeholders were raised in each category. Although the achieved satisfaction rates[7] did not substantially differ (in the range from 3,68 to 4,08) key findings can be summarised as follows (see Graph 2): activities related to Visibility and Finance received the highest ratings (4.08 and 4.05), Synergies and cooperation received the lowest rating (3.68). Among individual activities Interreg Day (in Visibility category) reached highest score (4.47) and Index (in Products and tools category) lowest score (3.24), which is rather specific product piloted by eight programmes in Baltic region (see Annex 4).

Graph 2 Satisfaction ratings for individual categories in Interact survey



Source: authors based on data provided by Interact survey

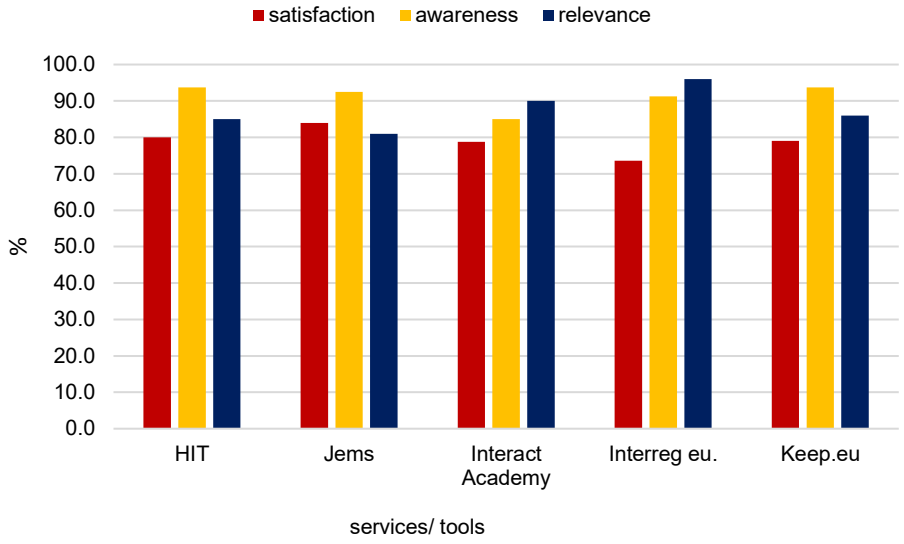
In 2024, post-event surveys were systematically conducted for each Interact event. While the overall satisfaction score was high (4.6), the average response rate was notably low at 27%, with a wide range from 3% to 60%. These routinely repeated surveys for individual activities reveal clear signs of survey fatigue, as confirmed by decreasing stakeholder engagement. Despite this, the provided feedback indicates that Interact's services remain well-targeted and in strong alignment with Programme objectives. The direction appears to be shifting toward a more structured, instructional format, with an emphasis on practical support, digital tools, and policy influence, over purely networking-focused approaches.

As the Interact and Evaluation surveys assessed some of the services/tools from various perspectives, despite varied metrics used across different surveys assessing satisfaction,

[7] on the scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is very satisfied, and 0 - did not use

awareness, and relevance, conversion to percentage enabled an approximate comparison (Graph 3). Findings indicate that most tools are reasonably well-known and considered relevant. Interreg.eu portal scored lowest in satisfaction despite highest relevance rating; but the renewed portal is currently available. Nevertheless, all ratings achieve very high values and confirm importance of the provided tools and services.

Graph 3 Comparison of satisfaction, awareness and relevance for selected Interact services/tools



Source: authors based on Interact and own surveys

Feedback on the knowledge and skills gained through Interact is overwhelmingly positive. Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT) including streamlined procedures, methodologies, high-quality tutorials, briefings, and guidelines proved useful and led to targeted adjustments in programme documents and control systems. Networks supported by Interact were highly appreciated and efficiently managed.

One of Interact's key strengths lies in its flexible tool usage, allowing programmes to select services based on their specific knowledge gaps or regulatory needs. Notably, programmes' feedback from Interact surveys, although not sufficiently representative[8], highlighted exceptionally high satisfaction with the personal communication and responsiveness of Interact staff (Annex 4).

"Thanks to Interact's extensive, tailor-made support …. MA have shifted from a strictly administrative approach to a more results-oriented and flexible one. This has allowed us to adapt to changing environments, foster bottom-up processes, and gradually reshape mindsets toward more modern and dynamic ways of thinking and acting."

On the other hand, programmes reported confusion due to Interact's information being dispersed across multiple platforms. The Interact Library was noted for its lack of a user-

[8] Needs assessment was distributed to all MA and JTS of 86 programmed in the middle of 2024, the feedback contained 16 responses

friendly interface and an effective search function, making it difficult to locate documents quickly, was a frequent source of dissatisfaction.

In addition to these challenges, internal limitations within programmes also posed obstacles. These included time constraints, limited financial resources, and long travel distances required to attend in-person sessions. Stakeholders experienced difficulties with the information retrieval and recommended automating data collection to ease the manual burden for platforms like keep.eu and Interreg.eu. Further issues included scheduling conflicts and the limited flexibility of Academy course offerings. In contrast, the potential for year-round availability of online courses was highlighted as a valuable solution for improving accessibility. Launched in 2023, the Interact Academy offers short e-learning courses and certified trainings and courses. The short courses are offered as short sessions available at any time. In certified trainings strict timing requirements conflicted with work obligations for many participants, which resulted in a low number of certified graduates. The necessity of participation at the training sessions taking place at precisely specified times proved to be unfeasible for some of the participants due to their work obligations. The current offerings may not fully address the wide range of individual needs, but a clearly defined strategic framework outlining the Academy's core focus and role is being developed.

2.1.3 Relevance of the products and services

To evaluate the relevance of Interact's products and services, a purpose-built evaluation questionnaire was developed[9], intentionally brief and easy to navigate (see Annex 6). This survey was distributed in May 2025 to all registered Newsflash subscribers via an additional Newsflash bulletin. The mailing reached a total of 1,740 users, of whom 342 clicked on the survey link. Ultimately, 269 users completed and submitted their responses. Although this sample does not statistically represent the full subscriber base, the response rate among those who accessed the link was remarkably high at 79%, providing a strong indication of engagement.

To allow for comparative insights, the survey categorized respondents in two key ways:

- by entity or programme type, grouping individuals working for i) Interreg/ IPA/ NEXT programmes, ii) Macro-regional Strategies (MRS)/ Sea-basin strategies, and iii) others because originally included non-Interreg EU fund had virtually no representation;
- by professional focus, dividing participants according to their roles in programme i) programme management, ii) finance/ control/ audit, iii) communication & visibility, and iv) other areas.

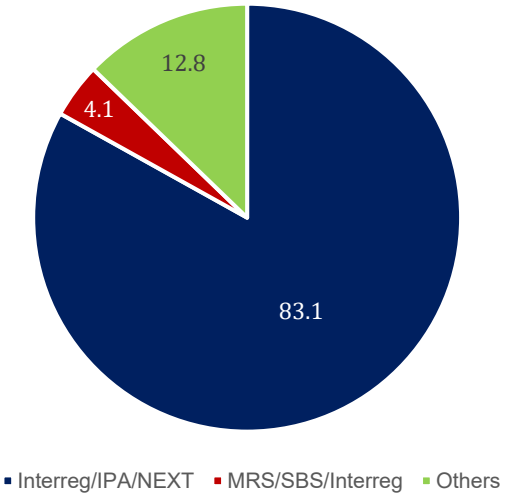
The group compositions and breakdowns are shown in Graphs 4 and 5.

The responses revealed that a rigid classification into originally predefined groups was not effective. Many participants reported involvement in multiple programmes, such as MRS, Sea-basin strategies, and Interreg. In such cases, the respondent was assigned based on the first entity they mentioned. As a result, some findings may reflect the influence of overlapping affiliations. Although this classification led to an uneven representation of individual groups, it

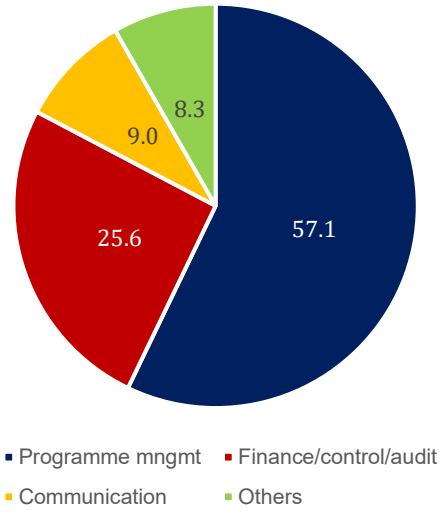
[9] Referred as Evaluation survey in the text

could broadly mirror the actual distribution of participating programmes and professional roles, namely among registered Newsflash subscribers.

Graph 4 Proportion of respondents by entity (%)



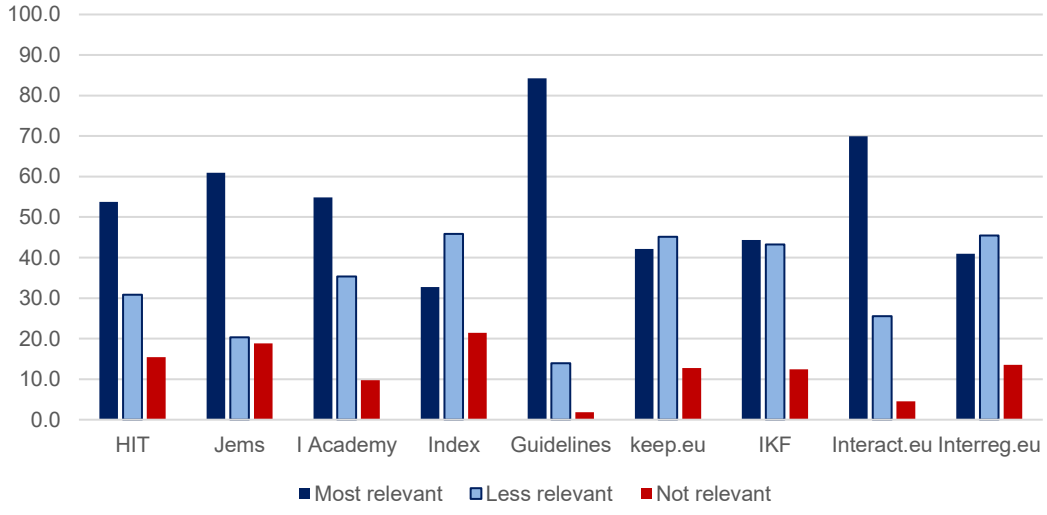
Graph 5 Proportion of respondents by profession



Source: Evaluation survey

The survey results (Graph 6) reaffirm the strong overall relevance of Interact's services, the ratings vary depending on the respondent's professional background. Across all three target groups, "Guidelines" consistently emerged as highly relevant, with the communication group giving it the highest score of 2.88 (out of 3). Finance professionals rated HIT and Jems slightly higher than other groups, reflecting their direct engagement with these implementation tools. Meanwhile, outreach platforms such as Interact.eu and Interreg.eu were highly valued by the communication group, but received lower ratings from finance group. The Interact Academy was considered most relevant by communication professionals (2.59), while finance professionals gave it a significantly lower score of 2.16. Index and keep.eu were rated lowest in relevance across most groups (for further details see Annex 6).

Graph 6 Proportion of respondents indicating relevance of services/tools (in %)



Source: Evaluation survey

These findings highlight how each group's day-to-day responsibilities shape their perception of value. Communication professionals prioritize clarity and engagement, while finance professionals seek structured, data-driven systems. The results underscore the importance of tailoring services and tools to meet the distinct needs of specific target audiences (see Table 2 and Annex 6).

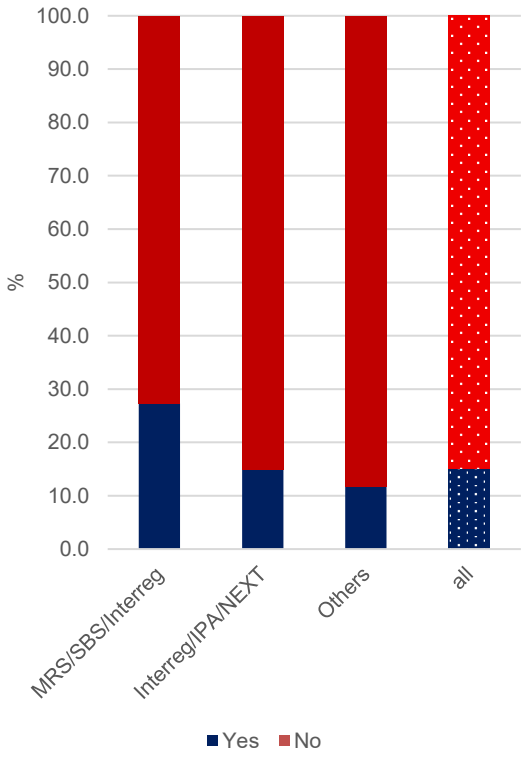
Table 2 Perceived Relevance of Interact Services/ tools by professions

Interact service/ tool	Programme Management	Finance/ control/ audit	Communication & visibility
Harmonised Implementation Tools	2.29	2.59	2.16
Joint Electronic Monitoring System	2.72	2.76	2.16
Interact Academy	2.43	2.16	2.59
Interreg Data Exchange (Index)	2.17	2.19	2.00
Guidelines / Documents / Publications	2.74	2.76	2.88

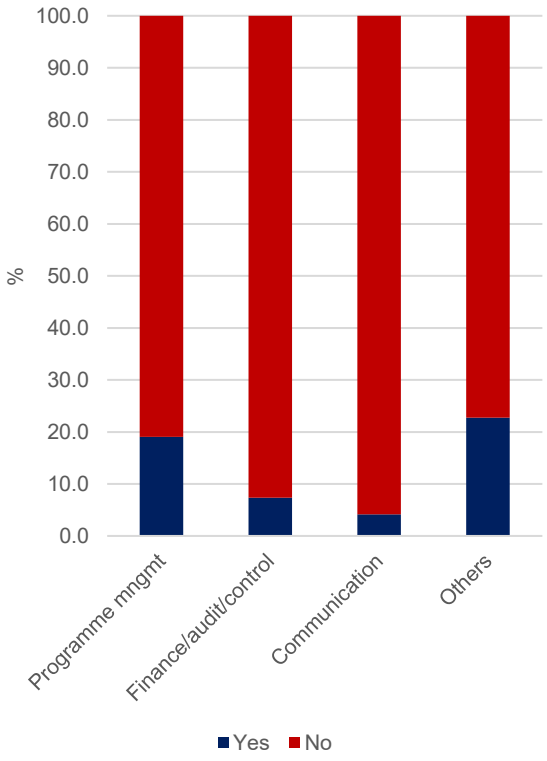
Average rating: 1 = Not Relevant, 2 = Less Relevant, 3 = Most Relevant
Source: Evaluation survey

The Evaluation survey examined whether respondents perceived any gaps in the available services or tools. Overall, approximately 15% of respondents indicated that something was missing (Graph 7 and 8) . The MRS group, when viewed by entity type, reported the highest perceived gap (27%), while the communication group, categorized by profession, showed the lowest perception of lacking services.

Graph 7 Missing services (by entity)



Graph 8 Missing services (by profession)



Source: Evaluation survey

Although the vast majority of respondents did not identify any missing services, a small number suggested additional tools or offerings that could serve as inspiration for future Interact activities. There was a clear call for advanced training opportunities targeting Interreg

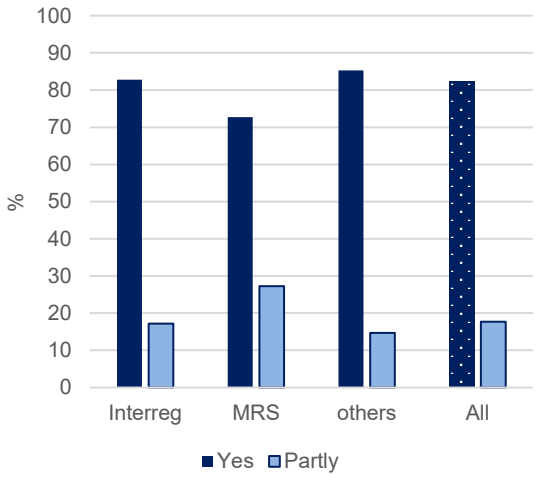
professionals, particularly in the domains of finance, monitoring, and evaluation. Respondents also expressed the need for practical resources such as checklists for public procurement and specific audits (especially for IPA), as well as in-depth workshops and manuals on programming and indicator methodologies. A recurring suggestion was for Interact to take a stronger role in interpreting post-2027 legislation and to represent programme interests collectively towards the European Commission, which is not limited to DG REGIO.

Additional feedback pointed to the importance of revitalizing knowledge-sharing formats, especially for National Contact Points, and enhancing the content value of Interact events beyond mere networking. In digital area, participants proposed the integration of AI tools, development of self-learning platforms, and improved linkage between SFC (EU system for fund management) and Jems, systems to streamline reporting processes. The full list of comments is available in Annex 6.

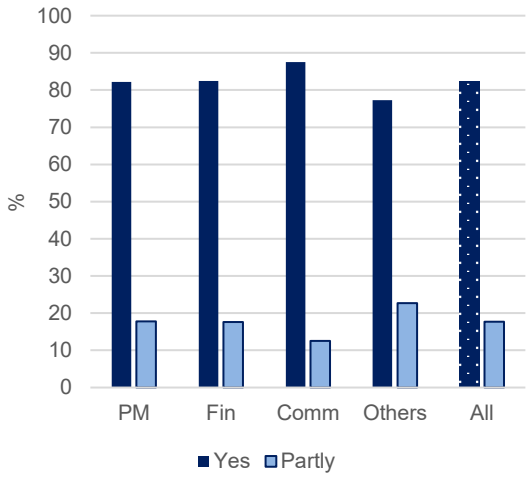
2.1.4 Methods of delivery

The data from the Evaluation survey indicate strong overall approval of the methods applied, with approximately 82% of all respondents affirming their usefulness. Among programme types**,** Interreg and others received the strongest ratings (above 82%)**,** whereas MRS reflected more reservations, with 27.3% indicating only partial usefulness (Graph 9). Communication professionals were the most satisfied (87.5% yes responses), while those in the others category showed slightly more hesitation (77.3%, Graph 10). Notably, there was not a single response stating dissatisfaction with the methods of delivery, an encouraging signal that the approaches are well received overall, though some refinements may be needed for specific groups.

Graph 9 Satisfaction with the methods used (entity)



Graph 10 Satisfaction with the methods used (profession)



Source: Evaluation survey

These results suggest general endorsement but also signal opportunities for refinement, particularly among MRS stakeholders and less engaged professional groups. The proposals for improved delivery methods from respondents mentioned Interact's digital platforms - including the website, newsletters, and forums, that are perceived as confusing, not user-friendly and difficult to navigate.

„The website and the 'intranet' are a bit confusing… registering and navigating is not very intuitive."
…
„I would appreciate a clearer and more structured overview of what Interact offers."

"Not only exchange of practices - there should always be support in finding solutions."
...
"Improve the way programmes could propose Jems improvements."

There is a strong preference for online and hybrid events due to budget and travel constraints. Users advocate for shorter sessions and more targeted, practical topics over broad networking formats. Participants request more hands-on support, training from "true Interreg experts",[10] and actionable guidance aligned with EU policies and programme needs. Users expressed a need for earlier access to explanatory documents and more effective channels to suggest improvements, especially for Jems and implementation tools.

Based on feedback from interviews and survey responses, Interact consistently delivers planned results, and the Programme never falls short of its targets. Despite Coordinating and managing the efforts required to achieve these results, remains a complex and challenging task. Despite the effort, certain programmes make limited use of Interact services, with varying reasons behind this, ranging from differing operational needs to alternative support structures. In the southern region, strict regulations often prevent programme staff from travelling; others face language barriers. Some programmes access services without formal registration, while more advanced ones may already have sufficient internal capacity and thus require less external support. Nevertheless, Interact continues to effectively support the majority of programmes, providing a broad and evolving portfolio of services that respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse range of target groups.

During discussions on potentially broadening Interact's target groups, occasional suggestions emerged regarding extending services to national and regional programmes. However, such an expansion would clearly demand considerable effort to build a reputation and brand comparable to the one already well-established among Interreg programmes. At present, Interact remains a relatively unknown actor within national and regional circles. Furthermore, any such development would require adequate staffing, financial resources, and specialised expertise, moreover, language question could be an issue. Although there is some backing for broadening the target group, demand for Interact's services, particularly in capacity building, would come from external border programmes/ enlargement countries along the eastern borders.

[10] Expression used by respondent of Evaluation survey

2.2 Task 2

Is the programme management system designed and used in an effective and efficient way in order to allow reaching the programme objectives?

2.2.1 Programme management

The Interact Programme stands out for its distinctive structure. It has the main features typical for standard EU-funded Technical Assistance (TA) programme but legally remains under the shared management rules and places particular emphasis on capacity-building services. TA programmes are typically designed to deliver professional, efficient support for the implementation and management of EU-funded initiatives. They commonly address areas such as regulatory systems, administrative capacity, financial control, and auditing. These responsibilities are usually carried out by internal staff employed within a single organisation and/or external experts. Such programmes are managed by a designated Managing Authority (MA) and generally operate over a programming period.

Interact adheres to the foundational principles of EU-funded Technical Assistance programmes and its core focus lies in supporting Interreg programmes, which promote cross-border territorial and transnational cooperation. It seeks to enhance institutional capacities by offering a diverse portfolio of services, tools and events, that support effective planning, implementation, financial management, and other challenges unique to cross-border collaboration. These services are delivered under the strategic oversight of its Managing Authority.

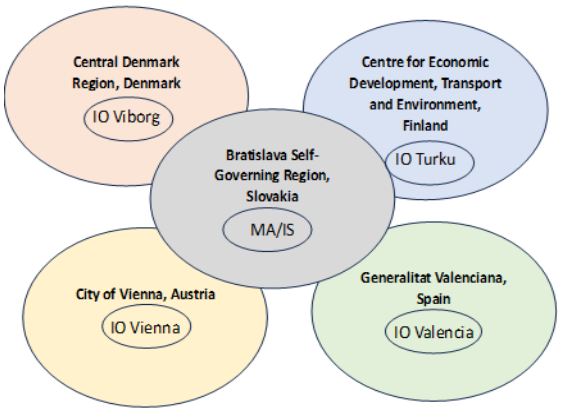
Unlike conventional TA programmes, the Interact Programme has been running for over 23 years, a longevity that has allowed it to evolve beyond typical norms. Over time, it has expanded in scope, number of activities, target groups, and staff size. Its long-standing nature has fostered organisational traits that resemble those of a multi-national institution rather than a standard programme. Although centrally coordinated by a Managing Authority, Interact operates across four offices situated in different EU member states. Each office is hosted by a distinct public institution, referred to as a Hosting Institution (HoI), and is embedded within its own national administrative and legal framework. As a result, staff members work under diverse rules and cultures.

The structure of the Interact Programme is rooted in its historical origins. When it was first established, the creation of new Technical Assistance programmes was not possible. As a result, a novel model had to be devised based on „shared management“, with the strategic aim of actively engaging Member States in the operation and governance of the Programme. This foundational decision shaped Interact’s unique organisational setup and continues to influence its collaborative approach to delivering services across borders.

Despite structural differences, Interact operates as a cohesive and unified entity. Staff across all Interact Offices (IOs) is identified as part of a single programme, working collaboratively across borders to jointly plan and implement activities. The IOs and Interact Secretariat serve as beneficiaries within the framework and function as the Programme’s operational arms,

delivering services that reflect the collective vision and shared purpose of the Interact community.

Picture 3 Interact Offices



At the time of Interact's establishment, HoIs showed strong dedication in supporting both the creation and operational setup of Interact Offices. Over time, the composition of these institutions has naturally shifted, and in some cases, their engagement and commitment levels have naturally adjusted in response to evolving organisational context and priorities. Despite these changes, the working relationships between IOs and HoIs remain constructive and marked by mutual trust and respect. All HoIs recognize the value of Interact, especially its contribution to international reputation, expert knowledge, and well-regarded events and services. Most IOs are based within local or regional institutions where Interact is not the organization's primary focus. This creates some challenges, as staff of IOs is international, requires flexible conditions, and often travels extensively, which may not align with the HoI's standard practices.

While Interact Offices share a common mission and collaborative framework, their operations are shaped by a range of contextual influences. Differences in working styles and national backgrounds can sometimes make consensus-building more complex. Cultural factors play a particularly significant role, as public sector norms vary widely between northern and southern European countries. These variations are reflected in management approaches, decision-making processes, and everyday administrative routines from handling travel reimbursements to internet access policies and preferred digital tools.

Local leadership also proves to be an important asset. When an IO Head is well-versed in the national legislative and administrative environment, their insight enhances the office's ability to operate effectively. Such leaders are often better positioned to maintain operational continuity, build strong relationships with HoIs, and respond swiftly to emerging challenges. However, this dual accountability balancing expectations from both Interact and the HoI, can lead to role ambiguity and tension. The divergence between upper-level Interact programme responsibilities and lower level HoI mandates adds another layer of complexity to management across offices.

Labour relations present one of the most intricate challenges within Interact's structure. Although Interact cross-office involvement in hiring decisions ensures strategic skill alignment, each HoI follows its own national recruitment protocols and payroll systems, resulting in non-uniform working conditions for staff members, who are directly contracted by their respective HoIs. Given this decentralised setup, HoIs are generally not in a position to evaluate individual performance, which complicates efforts to foster accountability and motivation. Furthermore, in some countries, strong labour union presence can constrain traditional motivational or disciplinary mechanisms, limiting their overall effectiveness. Staff performance is instead monitored by Head of IOs and the Managing Authority**,** whose mandate is to coordinate activities across the four Interact Offices. However, the MA's ability to influence staff

remuneration or employment conditions is limited, since these matters fall under the jurisdiction of each HoI, adding a further layer of complexity to personnel management. Moreover, limited flexibility due to being public employees requires careful navigation between formal rules and adaptive solutions.

A notable exception is the Vienna IO. Its HoI, the City of Vienna, manages several EU-funded and cross-border programmes under a single administrative framework, promoting strong information exchange and inter-programme synergies. To enhance IO‘s operation, HoI in Vienna has created a non-profit limited company owned entirely by the City of Vienna. This entity is not subject to rigid civil service regulations and employs international staff under flexible contracts This model provides enhanced flexibility in managing labour relations and administrative procedures, while maintaining accountability and alignment with public sector standards. It also illustrates a strategic method for embedding an international Programme within the institutional framework of the HoI.

Although the management structure of the IOs may seem flat on paper, the reality is layered and complex. IO staff are formally employed by HoIs, yet their day-to-day responsibilities are guided by the Heads of the IOs. Regular team-level meetings serve as an effective channel for distributing information from the Interact Coordination Board throughout the organization. In some IOs, Deputies may act on behalf of the Heads during their absence; however, in others, internal regulations of the HoI prohibit the designation of such a representative role.

Staff typically engage across multiple workstreams, collaborating with various Project Leads located in one of the IOs, while some activities fall under the oversight of Horizontal Managers. The Managing Authority is managing the Programme, with operational support from the Interact Secretariat. However, coordination extends beyond content, encompassing a range of administrative and strategic concerns. Crucially, there are no formalized rules or procedures at the Interact level that clearly establish decision-making hierarchies or reporting lines. This absence of structured governance contributes to a web of overlapping responsibilities, blurred authority, and at times, organizational ambiguity.

Individual experts play a crucial role within Interact. Thanks to their strong personalities and independent working style, they deliver innovative, high-quality services with minimal supervision required. However, managing such a dynamic group requires a structured framework to balance creativity with coordination. Reaching consensus among strong-minded individuals often proves challenging, with discussions tending to be lengthy and complex. The Managing Authority has primarily relied on its relational management skills to navigate interactions among the involved actors. While formal guidance through written rules or internal procedures has not been considered urgently necessary, preliminary groundwork has already begun, albeit without reaching completion.

2.2.2 Programme Bodies

The MA, with support from the Interact Secretariat, holds overarching responsibility for managing the Programme. Its core functions include:

- aligning funded activities with the Programme’s objectives and relevant EU regulations,
- ensuring sound financial management and the responsible use of funds,

- overseeing compliance with EU and national legal frameworks,
- preparing and submitting implementation data to the European Commission,
- monitoring and evaluating the Programme's performance,
- coordinating the operations of IOs.

Despite some stakeholders could perceive MA as a predominantly administrative entity, largely due to a long-standing view that it is not directly engaged in service delivery, the MA's role should be seen and performed as both strategic and multidimensional.

The Interact Secretariat plays a key supporting role in various areas, including financial management, IT infrastructure and monitoring, reporting, and the development of general guidelines (such as those related to indicators, procedures, and evaluations). Three Horizontal Managers - the Programme and Finance Manager, the Information Manager and Brussels Liaison Officer - are part of the Secretariat. Meanwhile, the Senior Communication Manager and the Senior Quality and Evaluation Manager operate from two different Interact Offices (Vienna and Viborg). However, the differentiation between horizontal managers, particularly the distinction between senior and non-senior roles, has no basis, because all Horizontal Managers have the same position, albeit with a different name. This lack of clarity may lead to confusion regarding responsibilities and internal coordination and could foster misunderstandings or misinterpretations among external stakeholders.

The Coordination Board serves as the means to effectively cooperate between IOs, coordinate the service delivery and assure the fulfilment of the joint activities and responsibilities of Interact. It consists of four Heads of Interact Offices, the Head and Deputy Head of the Managing Authority, four Horizontal Managers, and the Brussels Liaison Officer, with the Interact Secretariat supporting the Chair. Chair of the Board rotates among the Interact Offices every six months. Weekly meetings are organised with the full, extended composition of the Board, ensuring broad coordination and alignment across service delivery areas. In addition to the full-format Board, a smaller configuration composed of the Heads of IOs and the MA was envisaged for strategic-level discussions. However, its practical use has remained occasional and largely dependent on situational needs. While draft guidelines for the Coordination Board meetings are available, their pending formal adoption indicates that some governance aspects remain to be clarified, and that further refinement of operational procedures could be beneficial.

Heads of IOs are responsible for the daily management and delivery of operations and services, as well as for the continuous development of Interact programme activities in collaboration with other programme bodies. Their tasks include leading and developing expert teams, overseeing Operations of Strategic Importance, implementing and monitoring workplans. They are accountable for managing financial operations, ensure the proper maintenance of audit trails for all expenditures and support the Audit Authority during audits of operations. In addition, they represent the Interact programme externally and report on progress, achievements and results to the MA, MC and HoI.

According to the Rules of Procedure, the MC reviews the Programme's progress and approves key documents, including the evaluation plan, any amendment proposals submitted by the MA, the final performance report, and the annual work plan. The work plan is treated as a living document, meaning it can be updated over time without requiring formal re-approval.

The MC fulfils both strategic and operational roles. Its strategic function is particularly prominent during the programming phase, where key decisions and long-term direction are shaped. In contrast, its involvement during the implementation phase is more limited, as the development and adaptation of the Work Plan demand a level of flexibility that allows for timely responses to evolving needs and circumstances.

The MC receives relevant information on ongoing and completed Programme activities, including technical details. The Work Plan marks all activities that were originally planned and approved and the new activities including explanation of the reasons for changes, additional or replaced activities. Despite receiving detailed reports and quantitative data, some members of the MC express a lack of context and visibility into the operational processes behind the figures. This disconnect may stem from their experience in other programmes, where MC members are accustomed to making decisions on tangible projects with clearly defined deliverables. By contrast, Interact operates as a service provider, which fundamentally shifts the nature of outputs. The MC typically sees only the final, reported outputs, without insight into the time, coordination, and effort required to produce them. This lack can lead to perception of Interact's behind-the-scenes work and limit informed decision-making.

Interact's financial management is characterized by a streamlined and efficient structure. The programme operates under a co-financing model, with national contributions paid directly by individual member states to the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. Its implementation is notably smooth, without any irregularities. Unlike national and regional programmes, Interact does not rely on fixed project dates or rigid reporting structures, instead following a unique setup aligned with European Commission regulations. This flexibility, combined with proactive collaboration between the Payment Authority and other programme bodies, contributes to Interact's reputation as one of the best-performing programmes in terms of audit results and financial reliability.

2.2.3 Hybrid management structure

The hybrid structure (part TA programme, part multinational organisation), presents unique management challenges that require careful coordination, cultural awareness, and flexible operational strategies. Beyond the structural distinctions between Interact Programme and traditional organisation (see Table 3), the most notable difference lies in the area of human resource (HR) management (for further details see Annex 7).

Table 3 Main features Programme vs Organisation

Aspect	Programme	Organisation
Definition	A temporary structure focused on delivering a set of related projects to achieve specific objectives.	A permanent structure with ongoing operations, roles, and governance.
Duration	Temporary – exists only to achieve its goals.	Ongoing – continues indefinitely.
Governance	Often managed under a steering committee or programme board.	Managed by an executive team and board.
Focus	Strategic change and benefits delivery.	Sustaining operations and fulfilling a mission.
Structure	Cross-functional teams and project managers.	Departments with defined roles and responsibilities.

Resources	Draws on organisation's resources temporarily.	Owns and manages resources.

Source: authors, based on Turner, J.R. (2009). "The Handbook of Project-Based Management"

While programme staff are typically seconded or employed on a temporary basis for the duration of the programme, organisations generally rely on permanent employees working under a single employer (even in case of international companies HR policy is managed by the Headquarters). This fundamental difference is reflected across several HR dimensions, reinforcing the contrast between both models (see Annex 7). Despite these differences, some core principles remain consistent in both contexts. Effective human resource management requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities, conflict and performance management, fostering diversity, collaboration, and engagement, and compliance with relevant labour laws and ethical standards.

The incorporation of adhocracy elements into management introduces both benefits and challenges that must be carefully weighed. For instance, while team-based delivery and shared accountability foster collaboration, they often conflict with structured frameworks like RACI[11], which emphasize clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The matrix structure typical of an adhocratic model promotes individual autonomy and decentralized decision-making. While this can foster empowerment and flexibility, it also poses challenges for accountability and performance assessment (see Table 4). When autonomy becomes excessive, it may result in fragmented efforts and reluctance to engage in collaborative work.

Table 4 Advantages and disadvantages of adhocracy

Adhocracy	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Innovation and creativity	-
Employee empowerment because individuals experience a high level of autonomy and empowerment. This can lead to positive culture, increased job satisfaction, motivation, and a sense of ownership over one's work.	Decision-making ambiguity as decentralized decision-making can sometimes result in ambiguity and confusion about who has the authority to make certain decisions. This can slow down processes and lead to misunderstandings.
Flexible work environment where project-based structures, allow employees to work in ways that suit their strengths and preferences.	Difficulty in performance evaluation due to absence of clear performance metrics evaluating individual contributions. Moreover, close linked with the fact of completely different working contracts.
Enhanced collaboration as teamwork fosters a collaborative environment where diverse ideas can be shared and refined, leading to more innovative solutions.	Resource strain as a result of continuous push for innovation and rapid adaptation. It concerns both human and financial, as the programme constantly seeks justification of its operation closely tied to and conditioned by existence of other Programmes.

Source: authors, based on Turner, J.R. (2009). "The Handbook of Project-Based Management"

In practice, programmes like Interact, employ a hybrid management model**,** blending the flexibility of *adhocracy* with key elements of traditional project management. This approach

[11] The RACI Matrix (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) is a simple yet powerful tool used in project and programme management to clarify roles and responsibilities for tasks, decisions, or deliverables.

enables the use of adaptive teams and iterative planning, while retaining focus on defined programme objectives, risk management frameworks and transparent reporting structures. Such a setup empowers teams to make decisions independently, supported by light yet effective oversight. Programme management can successfully adopt an adhocratic approach, especially when innovation and agility are more valuable than rigid control. However, doing so demands strong leadership, clear communication and strategic balancing of autonomy with accountability.

2.2.4 Decision-making

As outlined, the Coordination Board, comprising senior Interact stakeholders including representatives of the MA, Heads of IOs, Horizontal Managers, and the Brussels Liaison Officer, convenes weekly to guide strategic and operational cooperation. The meetings are chaired on a rotating basis by one of the Heads of IOs, who oversees the agenda, moderates discussions, and ensures follow-up, with logistical and communication support provided by the Secretariat. While the Managing Authority (MA) plays a pivotal role in programme management, its current absence from chairing meetings may unintentionally contribute to the perception of its role being primarily administrative rather than strategic.

There is a strong commitment to consensus-based decision-making; however, the lack of formally defined roles and responsibilities in this area may limit operational effectiveness. The current documentation (see Table 5) offers only limited clarity on decision-making authority, which many stakeholders perceive as contributing to extended communication loops. This, combined with a complex governance structure and overlapping mandates across the four offices, can blur strategic messaging and hinder coordination.

The relations within the Programme are very informal and office coordination relies heavily on the discussions without formalised internal rules, which makes it difficult to ensure accountability. The Horizontal managers have a portfolio to deal with, but their roles in the Interact structure are not defined, leading to misalignment between different teams. The complicated structure of Interact and lack of clearly assigned competences results in unclear authority and slow or avoided decision-making by Coordination Board. Interact is fully aware of the challenges, as work on the necessary rules/guidelines was initiated long ago but remains unfinished, underscoring the continued relevance and urgency of these tools.

Table 5 Decision responsibilities of Interact programme's bodies

Role	Decision Responsibility
Monitoring Committee	Approving Work plan, evaluation plan, amendment of the Programme, final performance report
Managing Authority	Responsible for managing the programme, delivering the Programme objectives; selecting operations, carrying out programme management tasks
Programming Committee	Strategic decisions (scope, funding, priorities) in the programming phase
Coordination Board	Projects implementation - support of IOs
Head of Office	Daily operation and guidance of the IO, financial management
Horizontal Managers	Managing their particular areas of responsibility
Project Managers	Operational/ project-level decisions
Hosting Institution	Recruitment in cooperation with Interact, labour relations

Source: authors based on Interact documentation, Rules of procedure of MC, SID, Communication Strategy, Rules of eligibility of expenditures, minutes of MC

While this situation does not currently impact Interact's performance or activities, it may pose a potential risk in the future. The challenge arises if the demand to maintain high-quality services and enhance existing tools persists, while financial resources shrink and the scope expands to include broader target groups and additional incoming programmes.

2.2.5 Development of products and services

The development of products and services is primarily the responsibility of the Interact Offices, with partial involvement from the Interact Secretariat. The planning process begins with the creation of the Work Plan (WP), which is developed in collaboration with all Interact Offices and serves as the key document for planning, implementing, and monitoring Interact's activities and provision of services for the given year. The WP covers: long-standing standard activities, innovative ideas proposed by staff, new services derived from needs assessments identifying demands from target groups. It is always prepared for the upcoming year with mid-year update and is approved by the Monitoring Committee (MC).

The current WP outlines four main service delivery projects:

- Programme management and communication
- Finance and control
- Synergies and cooperation and
- Horizontal projects including: quality management, communication, IT tools and internal communication, Brussels liaison and management, coordination and human resources development.

Although the number of projects is limited, they are typically implemented throughout the entire programme period. The WP is aligned with the European Commission (EC), which plays a central role in strategic guidance of Interact's direction. Interact frequently acts as a bridge between the EC and Interreg programmes; their needs shape and steer the Programme activities. Interact has introduced new tools and mechanisms, such as Jems, to enhance programme management and foster cooperation. Through joint efforts, Interact supports consultations and feedback loops, helping the EC remain attuned to the diverse needs of territorial cooperation across Europe.

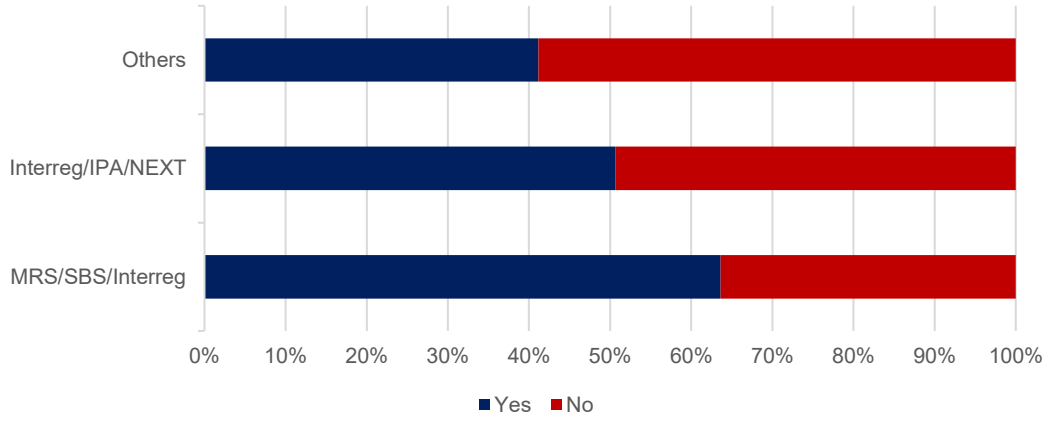
The EC works closely with Interact on thematic coordination, capitalisation initiatives, and regulatory dialogues, especially during preparations for future programming periods. The EC highly values Interact's cross-cutting knowledge and its capacity to synthesize insights from the broader Interreg community. While the EC relies on various sources of expertise and has numerous ways and sources of information, Interact is considered a key facilitator of cooperation, not only within Interreg but also in more complex areas such as Macro-regional Strategies, as well as IPA and NEXT programmes.

Programme performance is systematically tracked using predefined indicators established during the planning phase. When indicators are revised or newly introduced, planners must estimate milestones and target values, sometimes without the benefit of historical data or benchmarks. Monitoring is anchored in the approved Work Plan (WP), with particular

emphasis on accurately recording relevant events and participant numbers. To support data collection, the Interact Secretariat provides an online spreadsheet pre-filled with planned activities, which is shared with Interact Offices (IOs). The Lead Office consolidates indicator data to prevent duplication or overlap, and the Secretariat verifies submitted figures for accuracy. The time-consuming and laborious nature of this procedure indicates that with the rollout of the new Interact IT platform and tools, a more advanced system would be beneficial. The implementation of the system is planned in September 2025. Reporting duties rest with the Managing Authority (MA), which provides quarterly financial updates and semi-annual content reports incorporating aggregated indicator data on the Interact web page.

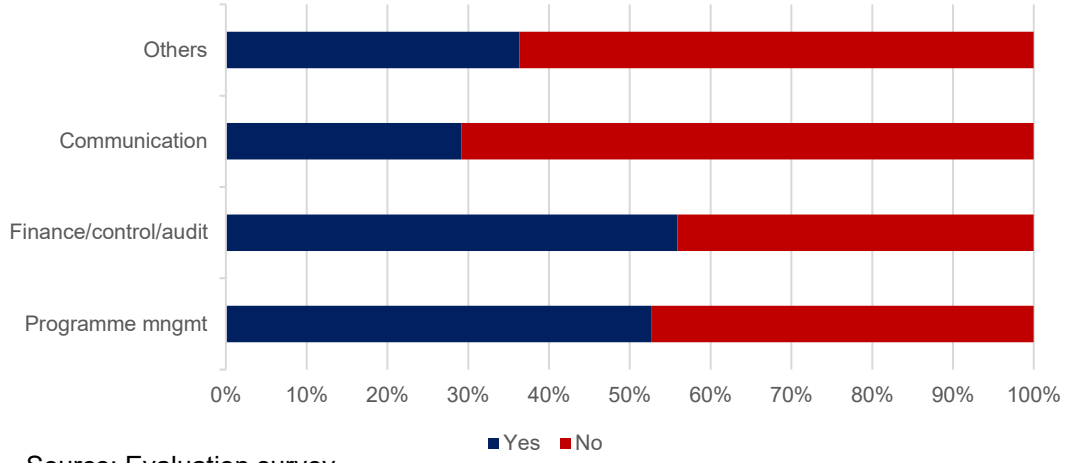
Cooperation with Interreg programmes in the development of products and services is highly encouraged and welcomed. It is based on discussions during various events and meetings. Feedback from users during the development phase is particularly valuable and helps tailor solutions to practical needs. Although active involvement is expected from the programmes, a survey conducted during the evaluation revealed that half of them participate in the development process. The picture is different for individual target group categories (see Graph 11 and 12) where the most involved are respondents dealing with MRS and Sea Basin Strategies (64%) and the least involved are respondents working in the communication (29%). Coincidentally, the overall involvement mirrors the experience with the uptake of certain services, such as the newly introduced Jems too, which is widely appreciated and currently used by about half of the target group programmes (see Annex 6)[12].

Graph 11 Involvement of programmes in Interact service/products development (by entity)



Graph 12 Involvement of programmes in Interact service/products development (by profession)

[12] Interview insights suggest that some programmes abstain from using Jems due to existing internal IT systems or security-related restrictions that prevent them from adopting external tools.



Source: Evaluation survey

Knowledge of how individual services and tools are used, and by which programmes, is currently quite limited. Several programmes either do not engage with Interact's services and tools at all or maintain only minimal contact. This may be due to a variety of reasons:

- Programmes with extensive experience may feel they have no additional need for external assistance.
- Language barriers might prevent active involvement.
- Smaller programmes may face limitations in human or financial resources, making it difficult to participate in Interact-organised activities.

Despite this, Interact offers a broad range of tools and services that allow programmes to select what best suits their specific needs. The communities and thematic networks developed under Interact provide a valuable platform for exchanging experiences and showcasing best practices. When needed, Interact is well-positioned to facilitate these cooperation networks and can tailor them to meet the unique needs of any programme group.

The recently developed Joint Electronic Monitoring System (Jems) exemplifies successful tool development in close cooperation with Interreg programmes. Jems is a harmonised, user-friendly platform created by Interact in collaboration with the Interreg community to support the full lifecycle of project management - from application to reporting. Launched in response to growing demands for operational efficiency, data accessibility, and streamlined processes, Jems builds on lessons learned from earlier system (ems - electronic monitoring system). It offers improved usability, enhanced interoperability, and full compliance with EU regulations.

"Jems is reducing administrative burden of programmes and participants"

...

"Big thanks to Interact for Jems! It makes a big difference! Such a good example of cooperation!"

What sets Jems apart is its open-source architecture and adaptability, allowing programmes to tailor features while maintaining a common structure based on the Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT). To date, 48 out of 86 Interreg programmes have adopted Jems, citing benefits such as: reduced administrative burden, simplified financial management and strengthened cooperation. The Use and satisfaction survey conducted by Interact in 2024 revealed that 80% of users found the system easy to use. Estimated savings across programmes reached €15.3 million compared to previous monitoring systems. The Evaluation survey also confirmed high relevance of the tool - with second highest ranking just behind the provision of guides and documents (see Annex 6).

"Jems is a reference site, appreciated by beneficiaries of the programmes."
…
"…reporting tool allowed to customise different types of reports (content-wise, financial ones, different periods) without slowing down the process, automatically issued the check list, allowing sample for more detailed checks … Huge improvement! Projects are happy."

Jems is more than just software, it is a collaborative achievement developed using agile scrum methodology. The participatory process engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including Interact Offices, programme experts, external auditors, and beneficiaries. Feature development was guided by community voting, with 35 top ideas selected from a pool of 190. The platform supports multilingual applications, risk-based sampling and automated reporting tools that accelerate payments and enhance quality assurance. It is especially important for small programmes, that would not have resources to develop such an IT tool.

2.2.6 Joint service delivery

IOs originally operated with a clearly defined regional focus, with staff primarily supporting programmes within their own geographic areas. Fluency in local languages added significant value to this approach. Today, service provision extends beyond regional boundaries, with cross-office teams comprising staff from multiple IOs. Despite this evolution, strong regional identities remain among some communities and target groups. In certain areas, particularly in southern regions, the presence of locally based Interact staff continues to be vital. The Interact staff offer deep insights into the regional context, communicate effectively in the local language, and possess an understanding of cultural, historical, and environmental factors that shape local needs. Their presence enhances the relevance and responsiveness of Interact's work and remains a key asset.

One of the key strengths of the Interact structure lies in its inherent flexibility, enabling Interact Offices (IOs) to collaborate seamlessly, coordinate activities across the network, and provide mutual support when necessary. This adaptability proves especially valuable in situations where public procurement procedures are more straightforward in certain IOs, or when challenges arise with a hosting institution and staff require safeguarding or relocation. A strong sense of shared purpose enables teams to bridge national and cultural differences, reinforcing a cohesive working environment. Over time, Interact has cultivated a robust culture of cooperation, marked by staff resilience, adaptability, and a collective commitment to the Programme's objectives. Although interpersonal dynamics, miscommunication, and structural

challenges occur, the organization is widely regarded as capable of managing and overcoming these complexities.

The term “joint” is used in two closely related but distinct ways within the framework, which can lead to confusion. In one context, it refers to joint actions or training programmes, highlighting Interact’s collaborative approach to service delivery with its target groups, namely representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders. In output indicators, “joint” signifies cross-border involvement of these actors. This collaborative relationship directly influences the quality of services, as the engagement of user groups plays a key role in shaping tools and aligning them with programme needs. Such involvement is essential for delivering relevant, high-quality services and, as reflected in the output indicators, it is a critical factor in the Programme’s overall success.

In another context, *joint service delivery*, as outlined in the methodology[13], specifically describes the internal collaboration among Interact’s teams across various offices. This includes joint planning, implementation, and follow-up of activities. According to the definition *Interact's service delivery relies on joint preparation, implementation, and follow-up of activities*. In practice, this means that the Interact team forms small implementation groups comprising experts from various IOs, who collaborate to deliver services. While most projects are coordinated by one Lead office, colleagues from other offices typically contribute to the work. In certain cases, such as the Jems project, an entire initiative may be delivered by a single office, particularly when specific expertise is concentrated there. Individual IOs also take responsibility for distinct tasks and thematic areas. The Coordination Board determines office involvement, while staff members generally select the tasks within their approved area of responsibility. This approach enables Interact to draw on the best skills across its teams, irrespective of location, resulting in strong engagement and high-quality service delivery.

While both interpretations centre on cooperation, they concern different types of relationships: the former is external, involving partners and stakeholders; the latter is internal, involving coordination among Interact staff. Staff feedback revealed varying understandings of the concept. Clarifying this distinction therefore enhances shared understanding and supports clearer communication not only for the indicators but other cooperation efforts, as well.

2.2.7 Collection of feedback

Internal feedback is supported through a variety of feedback mechanisms tailored to specific needs, including team meetings, informal sessions like Brown Bag discussions, and/or structured consultations via internal reference groups for topics such as evaluation, communication, IT tools, and post 2027 planning. The ongoing open discussion mood gives the possibility for any ad-hoc discussions.

Externally, stakeholder feedback is primarily gathered through brief post-event surveys, focus groups, and targeted assessments of satisfaction and needs. In addition to these formal methods, informal discussions with stakeholders frequently occur during Interact events and

[13] Methodology for establishing the Interact IV performance framework

other occasions. These tools remain the most effective and widely preferred means of informing service development and capturing user insights. Surveys will also play a key role in evaluating result indicators once the Programme concludes.

However, a structured mechanism to complete the feedback loop is still missing. Aside from post-event surveys, there is limited evidence that the findings of more complex surveys are consistently reported or systematically integrated into the service improvement process. This gap limits the potential impact of stakeholder input and hinders the Programme's ability to adapt and evolve based on user needs.

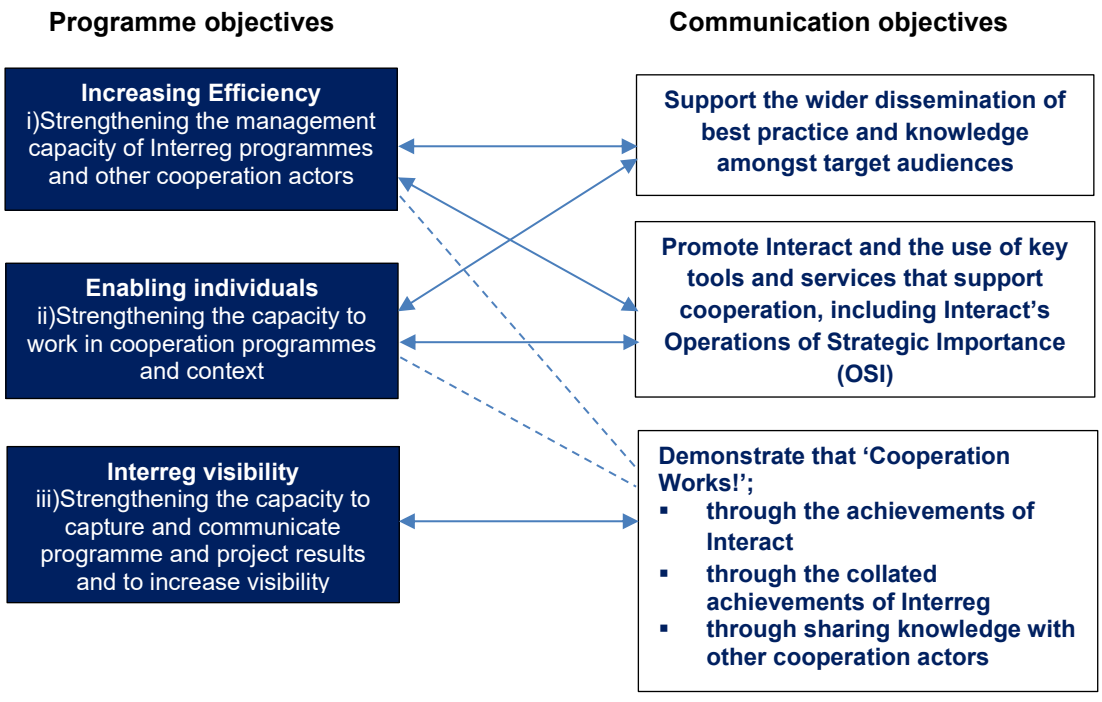
2.3 Task 3

What is the progress in the implementation of the Interact communication strategy and achievement of the communication objectives?

2.3.1 Objectives of the Communication Strategy

The objectives of the Communication Strategy are clearly aligned with and contribute to the overarching programme objectives. The communication strategy emphasizes dissemination of knowledge, which is directly linked with the programme's goal of strengthening management capacity and cooperation. The same linkage is visible in the promotion and use of tools and services assisting identical Programmes goals. The Programme objective focused on increasing of visibility directly relates to the communication goal demonstrating achievements of cooperation. This is achieved not only through showcasing Interact's own achievements but also by collating and disseminating results from across the Interreg community. By promoting best practices, knowledge exchange, and the use of strategic tools and services, such as those under Operations of Strategic Importance (OSI), the communication objectives reinforce the programme's ambition to improve cooperation governance and enable individuals to work effectively in cross-border contexts.

Picture 4 Relationship between communication and programme objectives



Source: authors

The focus of strategy on targeted dissemination and stakeholder engagement supports the Programme's aim to build management capacity and foster a harmonized approach across cooperation actors. Communication efforts are designed to reach relevant audiences with tailored messages, ensuring that knowledge is not only shared but also applied. This includes promoting Interact's services, facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, and supporting the uptake of tools that enhance efficiency. In doing so, the Communication Strategy acts as a bridge between strategic intent and operational delivery, ensuring that visibility, relevance, and impact are maximized throughout the programme lifecycle.

2.3.2 Communication framework and wider audiences

As highlighted above, Interact's success is deeply rooted in the effectiveness of its communication with target groups. Accordingly, well-structured documents that define all essential aspects of communication are of paramount importance. From the previous programming period, Interact inherited the *Interreg Brand Strategy Manual*, developed in cooperation with an external contractor, based on the results of surveys conducted among Interreg programmes and project partners. This defined Interreg's vision and mission, emphasising on cooperation "across and beyond borders."[14]

Following this, the *Interreg Brand Design Manual*, updated in January 2023, outlined how to ensure Interreg's visibility to a wider audience, translating strategy into clear visual guidelines, ensuring consistent brand use across programmes, including NEXT/IPA programmes. Its ultimate aim - to show that cooperation in Europe delivers tangible results.

While raising awareness of the Interreg logo and setting clear usage rules is essential, it represents only one dimension of the communication effort. The other equally important dimension concerns the rules for using the Interact logo, which are detailed in the programme's primary communication document, the *Interact IV Communication Strategy*. This strategy defines the programme's overarching communication framework. It further sets out two core objectives: firstly, to strengthen Interreg's positioning within the wider cooperation and cohesion policy framework; and secondly, to enhance the visibility of Interact's activities, targeting both existing cooperation partners and potential new participants.

The document introduces the concept of Interact's "two personas", distinguishing them from the "dual roles" of Interact III, and clarifying the appropriate use of each logo. The *Interact brand persona* is used within the cooperation context, targeting those already engaged in cooperation. The *Interreg, by Interact persona* is intended for audiences outside the cooperation context, though officially only in exceptional cases. Although meant for limited occasions, this second persona is often used for major events such as Project Slam*,* Interreg

[14] Interreg Brand Strategy Manual, p. 25, 27.

Day and when sharing Interreg's achievements, giving it significant public visibility, addressing wider policy actors' audiences.[15]

Notably, the document refreshes and energises the mission statement from the previous period, rephrasing it as: "Cooperation can be complex; our job is to make it easier." This reflects and reinforces the programme's overarching objectives.

A prime illustration of the strategic use of both logos is the evaluation report on Interreg Cooperation Day[16], one of the flagship communication campaigns designed to enhance the visibility of European Territorial Cooperation. Held annually, the initiative mobilises events across Europe and beyond to demonstrate the tangible benefits of working together across borders. These events, ranging from cultural festivals and recreational activities to sports events and workshops, are specifically designed to engage citizens who would not normally be directly involved in EU cooperation projects, thereby broadening outreach and strengthening public awareness.

The evaluation report synthesizes data collected by Interact alongside surveys from participating programmes, thereby providing a robust evidence base. The findings are presented in a clear, contemporary, and visually engaging format, serving both accountability purposes and the advancement of strategic learning within the broader cooperation framework.

Beyond the documents governing specific aspects of communication and its outputs, the Programme's contractual framework explicitly incorporates communication obligations. In particular, agreements with hosting institutions include a publicity clause, thereby positioning these institutions as active contributors to the programme's external communication.

The communication strategy, designed in December 2023, was based on anticipated developments that have not fully come to fruition. For instance, while the plan envisioned the website as the primary channel for delivering the Newsflash, it is currently disseminated via email. As a result, the strategy does not always reflect current operational realities. However, this misalignment appears to be temporary, largely due to the ongoing transition to a new IT platform and the phased rollout of the updated website. These changes are expected to be reflected in the forthcoming revision of the strategy, with missing features gradually introduced through continued system enhancements.

2.3.3 Communication IT tools

Interact transitioned from IBM to a Microsoft-based IT platform in March 2025, following a delayed procurement. This included transferring email, calendar data and cleaning a contact

[15] Interact IV Communication Strategy defines them as "a 'catch-all' category for all other stakeholders of interest. It includes the European Commission, and DG REGIO specifically, as well as other DGs where Interact work has a direct connection, such as Audit, Evaluation. It also includes the 'citizens and wider public' who may be interesting in Interact's activities (to promote Interreg in particular)".

[16] Initiative was launched in 2012 under the name *European Cooperation Day* and implemented in more than 30 countries; it was rebranded in 2022 to align more closely with the Interreg brand and its strategic communication objectives.

database of over 9,000 entries, resulting in 1,500 targeted re-registrations. The new system includes enhanced features such as automatic event registration, shared logins across services (e.g. Interact website and Interact Academy), and behaviour-based audience categorisation (e.g., identifying interests by event participation, which may provide better picture on target groups size, focus and composition).

Interact's platform supports multiple portals (Interact.eu, Interreg.eu, Keep.eu, and Interact Academy), each targeting distinct audiences. Interact targets professionals with media-rich content, while Interreg serves a broader public. Efforts are underway to establish a unified framework for IT tools and communication strategies. However, cross-platform integration challenges persist and demand further improvement. Discussions have also focused on developing centralized knowledge management systems to streamline data and minimize redundancy.

2.3.4 Effectiveness of communication approaches

Feedback from the target audience is essential for assessing the effectiveness of the communication strategy. To gather these insights, Interact regularly conducts surveys among recipients. As already mentioned, the 2023 Interact Use and satisfaction survey showed highest ratings for the Visibility and Communication approach categories, with Interreg Day and the Newsflash emerging as top-performing tools (see Annex 4). In contrast, the outdated and user-unfriendly website received the lowest scores, prompting its redesign and relaunch in January 2024. Throughout the year, the focus was on enhancing usability and equipping staff with the skills to manage content of the new web portal through targeted training as well as the development of an editing guide. Website improvements continue, particularly to address remaining challenges such as the search functionality.

The Interact Use and satisfaction survey (see Table 5, Annex 4) confirmed that communication efforts are largely effective, with target audiences finding the shared information relevant to their needs. The Newsflash was particularly well-received, being considered a useful source of timely content. However, certain areas showed room for improvement: while timely information was appreciated, its delivery was rated slightly lower (under 4 on a 5-point scale), and website navigation received the lowest score despite the presence of relevant material. These findings suggest that while content quality is strong, enhancing user experience, particularly through improved web accessibility and faster information flow, should be a priority moving forward.

Table 6 Effectiveness of Interact communication approach

Question	rating
The information I get from Interact is relevant for my work	4,30
Interact shares info in a timely manner	3,95
The Newsflash is useful way to find relevant info	4,25
I find relevant info on Interact website	4,05
Interact website is easy to navigate	3,50
I know how to find a contact Interact experts on topics I am interested in	4,10

Source: Interact, rating 1 - 5 (strongly agree)

The Newsflash and collaboration platforms were highlighted as valuable tools for receiving updates, engaging on targeted topics. The access of follow-up materials from events (such as presentations) were also appreciated. Interact's overall communication strategy has been positively received and contributed to building strong relationships with its target audiences. However, feedback indicates that the messaging can feel overly generic or impersonal, as the survey does not sufficiently differentiate between the needs of distinct audience groups. Respondents suggested clearer segmentation of recipients and more tailored communication based on roles, such as MA/JS management or project managers. Clarifying the intended audience for each message could significantly increase relevance and reduce information overload.

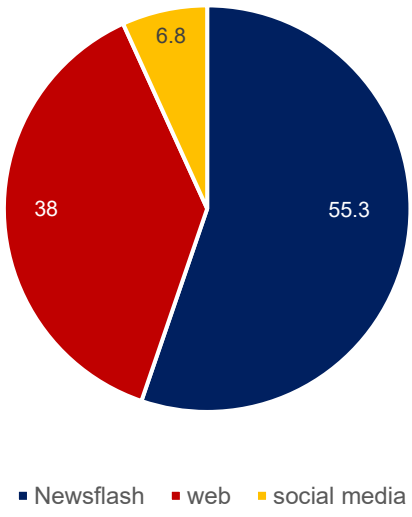
2.3.5 Interact's Communication Performance

The Evaluation survey assessed how effectively Interact communicates with its target groups, revealing that preferences for communication tools vary significantly across target groups (segmented by entity and profession). For example, 75% of MRS/Sea-basin strategies respondents favour the Newsflash and show minimal interest in social media (see Annex 6). Among Interreg and other programmes, 54% prefer the Newsflash, while only 6-7% opt for social media. Similar trends are seen in groups involved in programme management, finance/ control/ audit - with social media having marginal relevance. In contrast, communication staff and other professionals place greater emphasis on social media as part of their communication toolkit, although it still represents less than 20%.

The implementation of the Interact‘s communication strategy has evolved showing alignment with its strategic objectives, especially in terms of digital transformation. Active presence at various flagship events like Interreg GO!, and EU Regions Week as well as events such as Interreg Knowledge Fair organised by Interact, strengthened physical visibility and promoted Interact activities. Digital outreach improved with the Newsflash.

The effectiveness of communication flows is conditional to address right target groups with relevant topics. This was confirmed by the Evaluation survey (Graph 13), showing substantial differences in preferred/ used communication tool. Overall, 55,3% of respondents identified the Newsflash as the most effective communication tool, followed by the Interact web portal (38%) and social media (6,8%). The effectiveness of communication tools, including the Newsflash and targeted emails, is evident in their ability to deliver key messages efficiently and engage stakeholders, while social media engagement is declining.

Graph 13 Effectiveness of communication tools (%)



Source: Evaluation survey

Evaluation survey provides evidence that harmonisation efforts are widely appreciated, particularly for their role in fostering cooperation and reducing administrative burden. Tools and products are seen as flexible and useful, especially when based on programme experience and developed by knowledgeable staff. Networking and exchange between programmes are considered highly valuable, with Interact playing a key mediating role. However, there is a suggestion to better segment communication according to audience needs. Current messaging is perceived as overly centralized and simultaneously too generic, lacking broader reach and clear segmentation of audiences based on interests, programs, professions, or other relevant criteria. Suggestions from respondents ask for more targeted outreach and tailored information, that would improve relevance and impact for different user groups.

Surveys play a vital role in Interact's communication and feedback processes, providing structured insights that inform service development and foster stakeholder engagement. The biennial surveys conducted by Interact are particularly important for capturing stakeholder needs and satisfaction. However, the findings from the Use and Satisfaction Surveys, along with the Needs Assessment, offered only partial insights due to a limited number of responses, highlighting room for improvement. Moreover, the predominance of feedback from regular users suggests a degree of selection bias, potentially reinforcing the impression that the results mainly reflect the views of already engaged and satisfied stakeholders.

In practice, the Interact target group is highly diverse, comprising several unevenly sized subgroups with varying interests (see Graphs 4 and 5 from the Evaluation survey). As a result, survey questions may not be relevant to all respondents, particularly those without direct experience with certain services, leading to response fatigue and reduced willingness to participate. Feedback also highlights the need to refine and clarify terminology to ensure meaningful input and guidance for respondents ensuring that the results can be properly analysed. Responses to open-ended questions indicate some difficulties that might be also caused by ambiguous terminology or participants‘ tendency to deviate from the intended focus of the questions, choosing instead to express personal opinions or highlight issues they consider important.

The value of data collection lies in its full processing and the provision of comprehensive feedback to relevant stakeholders. In the case of Interact surveys, this step was missing, only some information was shared with the Monitoring Committee. Crucially, the feedback is most relevant to Interact staff, who would need access to the complete survey results for their work. Without this, the utility of conducting the surveys is fundamentally diminished. Survey results presented to the MC could include more in-depth content, backed by both qualitative insights and quantitative analysis.

The knowledge about proportion of programmes using individual services is very approximate. Overall, there is no justified explanation why some programmes do not use the Interact services and/or use it very little. As already mentioned, the assumed explanations may include experience of the programmes, language barriers and/or lack of financial or human resources, but this has not been supported by any data. Nevertheless, the EC has a comprehensive understanding of the performance of all Interreg and other programmes, and are well-positioned to offer guidance on where support is most needed. This valuable insight should

serve as a reference point and could be complemented by individual discussions with the respective programmes.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Achievement of Programme objectives

The findings indicate that the Interact IV Programme has advanced meaningfully toward its central goal of reinforcing cooperation governance by building institutional capacity, although it naturally faced some challenges.

A wide range of activities has effectively transformed inputs into outputs that meet operational goals and stakeholder needs. Current progress shows that the final goals are likely to be achieved. While the Interact IV Programme's core intent remains consistent, discrepancies in the articulation and framing of objectives across programme documentation, along with the absence of precise definitions for key terms such as services, tools, and products, etc., undermine clarity and may result in interpretative ambiguity. The discrepancy in the objectives stated in the programme document and the performance framework posed some challenges for evaluation, especially when reconstructing the intervention logic and linking outputs and results to stated objectives.

Overall, the intervention logic of the Programme is sound; and a few minor adjustments could enhance its accuracy and make monitoring and evaluation processes more straightforward and effective. Like other programmes, Interact was required to select common indicators that best aligned with its objectives. Despite the effort, the selected common result indicators does not fully correspond to the Programme's specific goal. Rather it captures intermediate effects that contribute to, but not directly represent, the final results. This choice, however, reflected the best available option within the predefined set of common indicators, as no more suitable alternative was offered.

The result indicators created just for Interact are meant to be measured through surveys at the end of the Programme. These indicators focus on two areas: knowledge/skills and solutions. But because of earlier issues with unclear wording, people involved may struggle to distinguish between these two. Past Interact survey results show this has already been a problem, and more confusion is likely. Also, since the output indicator for jointly developed solutions covers a wide mix of deliverables, it doesn't make much sense to separately track how programmes use knowledge/skills and solutions at the level of result indicators. Instead, using one combined indicator that shows how all outputs from Interact services are actually used would probably be a more practical and efficient way to measure results.

Based on the results of the Interact Use and satisfaction survey, high rates of satisfaction do not suggest any need to re-focus the activities of the Programme. All the services and tools are in line with the needs and shaped by the stakeholders. Complementary sources and additional surveys reinforce this positive perception. The questionnaire results reveal some small inconsistencies. For instance, questions related to synergies and cooperation received the lowest ratings (though still high) among all categories, despite cooperation being Interact's core focus and a major area of activities. This disparity suggests that while overall feedback is positive, the survey results might also be affected by structure of survey/ questions, sampling bias, ambiguity of terminology or other distortions. Although, the existing glossary of

definitions includes terminology related to Interreg programmes, it does not incorporate terms specific to Interact.

Stakeholders feedback highlighted several important barriers affecting the uptake of Interact services and tools. One of them was the request for greater flexibility in training formats. Although the training portfolio is broad, some of the courses still rely heavily on structured sessions that may conflict with participants' professional responsibilities. To address this, a more flexible approach, such as a self-paced e-learning model that integrates on-demand lectures, scheduled consultations, and follow-up assessments, could offer greater convenience, without compromising the quality of training. Such a system, accessible any time, could significantly increase both participation and graduation rates, particularly for certified courses.

Signs of survey fatigue are increasingly apparent - namely in Interact post-event evaluations, where response rates have declined sharply for certain activities. This trend underscores the need for more targeted outreach, streamlined survey design, and potentially alternative approaches to ensure meaningful and reliable stakeholder input. Long-standing, regularly repeated activities may require little to no specific feedback, or could be evaluated through a simplified survey format. In contrast, newly introduced activities warrant closer attention to tailor both the survey's form and content to the stakeholders' needs. Together, these changes could enhance engagement and result in richer, more reliable feedback, ultimately supporting better service delivery and strategic refinement.

The Evaluation survey reconfirmed the strong relevance of Interact services and tools. However, it also emphasized the importance of tailored targeting to better understand the diverse needs of individual stakeholder segments. Since certain services are designed for specific target groups, the survey revealed notable differences in perceived relevance, delivery methods, and preferred communication channels (see Annex 6). These findings suggest that future surveys should be more targeted and personalised, rather than relying on broad, generalised research addressed solely to MA or JS.

Only a small number of the Evaluation survey respondents indicated that some services were lacking; however, based on their comments, these appeared to be suggestions for refinements rather than major gaps. Since the feedback relates to specific aspects of service delivery, a summary has been shared with Interact staff for consideration in future service enhancements (details can be found in Annex 6).

Stakeholders expressed very high satisfaction with the methods of service delivery, with no respondents reporting dissatisfaction, and only a minimal proportion expressing partial satisfaction. This trend was most noticeable among target groups that are not the primary focus of Interact, such as MRS and other professional profiles. The proposed improvements highlight nuanced service aspects and could once again serve as inspiration for further development. In case any of the proposals is implemented, the provision of concise, informative feedback to stakeholders, especially when their suggestions have contributed to quality improvements, may help reinforce their engagement and trust.

3.2 Programme management

The Programme consistently delivers high-quality services, demonstrating the resilience and flexibility of its operational model. Although Interact's distinctive organisational structure does pose certain inherent challenges, it has not undermined the effectiveness or efficiency of service delivery. Internally, however, the multi-employer setup, where staff are contracted by different institutions under varying labour systems, introduces tension. Different administrative cultures, political environments, and administrative mindsets within public institutions complicate alignment. These differences span recruitment and payroll procedures, organisational hierarchies, workplace cultures, and approaches to accountability, motivation, and discipline, all shaped by national frameworks. While staff share a common vision, the fragmentation of employment conditions occasionally disrupts operational cohesion and clarity, making performance assessment particularly difficult**.**

Interact's success hinges on its greatest asset: a highly skilled and talented workforce. Service delivery is powered by these professionals, whose expertise ensures continued excellence. Although, Interact is presented as a flat and streamlined entity, its internal structure remains inherently multi-layered. The lack of a clear hierarchy, coupled with the presence of multiple authority figures, such as the Hosting Institution, Project Leads, Heads of IOs, Horizontal Managers, and Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat, can leave staff uncertain. In such ambiguity, they may choose to act independently or refrain from action altogether.

Cooperation isn't just central to the Programme's mission; it's one of its defining strengths. Yet, balancing consistency with flexibility remains a persistent challenge. Achieving this equilibrium is essential to avoid misalignment across teams and functional areas. The incoherence in roles and procedures complicates coordination efforts and significantly increases the burden on management. To address these structural tensions, the development of binding inter-institutional rules between the MA and HoI, with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines, would bring much-needed order and clarity to Interact's governance framework.

As the formal coordination body, the Coordination Board, led by the Managing Authority, plays a key role in clarifying escalation pathways and enabling timely decisions, especially within the context of complex, cross-border collaboration. While the Board may appreciate shorter discussions and swift decision-making; the relevant procedures, though drafted, remain formally unadopted. The absence of clearly defined roles, particularly regarding decision-making, contribute to a misperception of Board's role while overlapping mandates across offices weaken strategic clarity. Internal communication and decision-making still require targeted improvement, as unresolved issues in these areas risk delaying progress.

These challenges have not affected programme operations, but they do impact staff well-being and could present operational risks if left unaddressed. Fortunately, many of these risks can be mitigated through relatively straightforward measures, foremost among them being the adoption of internal procedures and a clearly defined governance framework that outlines specific tasks and responsibilities. Such improvements would foster greater coherence in programme management, while also aligning internal roles and standardizing the titles and responsibilities of Horizontal Managers with their actual operational functions. Additionally, the

introduction of internal Deputy roles for Heads of Interact Offices (IOs), even if not officially recognised within Hosting Institutions (HoIs), could offer valuable managerial support and contribute to more efficient coordination and day-to-day decision-making across the Interact structure. The Programme's structure itself underscores the critical role of internal procedures in ensuring coherent and effective management as well.

The Interact Programme's hybrid structure, straddling both the characteristics of a TA programme and those of a multinational organisation, introduces distinct management challenges that call for nuanced coordination, cultural fluency, and agile operational approaches. A key differentiator lies in human resource management, where the temporary and decentralised nature of programme staff contrasts with the centralised, permanent HR models of traditional organisations. Despite these differences, certain universal human resource principles remain vital: clear role definition, effective performance measured by a few indicators, conflict management, inclusive and ethical practices. In practice, Interact embraces a flexible management style rooted in adhocracy, blending adaptability with structured oversight. This empowers decentralized teams while maintaining alignment with strategic objectives, provided strong leadership, communication, and accountability mechanisms are in place. While the current approach remains viable under existing conditions, projected budgetary changes could necessitate a leaner and more cost-efficient organisational setup in the future.

While the Programme's performance remains unaffected, minor adjustments could help eliminate inefficiencies that pose a latent risk, particularly as future developments may introduce greater demands or potential financial or operational constraints. Without targeted governance improvements and a clearer delineation of roles, the Programme risks compromising the quality and sustainability of the Interact tools, particularly as operational demands grow with the anticipated inclusion of external border programmes/ enlargement countries along the eastern borders requiring Interact's support.

Teams and offices demonstrate resilience, flexibility, and shared commitment to Programme goals. While interpersonal dynamics, miscommunication, and structural complexities remain, the organization is seen as capable of overcoming these challenges. The advantages and disadvantages of the institutional structure currently offset each other, maintaining a workable equilibrium. As long as this balance holds, there is little impetus for change. However, external influences have the potential to disrupt this stability, which could lead to a fundamental restructuring.

Based on the findings, it is evident that the Interact Programme has established a structured and collaborative framework for the development and delivery of products and services, primarily carried out by Interact Offices and grounded in the Work Plan (WP). The WP functions as a strategic anchor and aligns closely with the European Commission's priorities, enabling Interact to act as a trusted intermediary between the EC and Interreg programmes. While monitoring and reporting frameworks are well-established and procedurally robust, the processes of data collection and verification remain time-consuming and resource-intensive. The newly introduced IT platform offers functionalities that could significantly support and streamline these reporting and monitoring requirements.

Interact continues to play a pivotal role in facilitating cross-border cooperation, thematic dialogue, and strategic innovation, provided it remains responsive to evolving demands and actively cultivates feedback and collaboration from its user community. The differentiated participation rates among target groups in relation to individual services and tools underscore the need for greater clarity, targeted outreach, and technical adaptability. Moreover, limited insight into how services are used by individual programmes highlights the importance of strengthening engagement mechanisms and tailoring support to diverse needs.

The recent development and implementation of one of the Interact tools - Jems, marks a significant milestone in digital innovation and stakeholder collaboration within the Interreg community. As an open-source, adaptable platform rooted in shared governance Jems successfully responds to sector-wide demands for efficiency, transparency, and regulatory alignment. Its widespread uptake, tangible financial savings, and strong user satisfaction, underscored by survey results (see Annex 6), demonstrate its relevance and impact across diverse programme sizes and geographies. More than a technical solution, Jems embodies a collective achievement that advances harmonisation and empowers mainly small programmes. However, it is also a future inevitable commitment for Interreg to sustain this tool and ensure its maintenance and updating.

Interact's evolving service delivery model demonstrates a dynamic balance between regional expertise and cross-office collaboration. While local presence remains vital for contextual relevance and cultural fluency, particularly in southern regions, the structure's flexibility allows Interact Offices to pool expertise and respond adaptively to operational challenges. The dual meaning of "joint" service and action highlights both internal cooperation across IOs and external engagement with target groups, reinforcing the participatory ethos at the heart of Interact's approach. This synergy between staff collaboration and stakeholder involvement directly enhances service quality and ensures the Programme's continued relevance, responsiveness, and success.

Internal feedback flows through a mix of formal and informal mechanisms, from team meetings to topic-specific consultations, cultivating a climate of openness and ad-hoc exchange. Externally, stakeholder input remains a cornerstone for guiding service refinement, primarily collected through focused post-event surveys, thematic focus groups, as well as surveys on Use and satisfaction and Needs assessment (Annex 4 and 5).

3.3 Communication strategy and achievement of its objectives

The Communication Strategy plays an instrumental role in advancing the Programme's overarching objectives by fostering knowledge dissemination, strengthening management capacity, and promoting cross-border cooperation. Its targeted approach not only amplifies the visibility of cooperation achievements but also showcases both Interact's contributions and broader results from the Interreg community. Through strategic promotion of best practices, collaborative tools, and initiatives like Operations of Strategic Importance, communication activities actively enhance governance and empower programmes to cooperate with the community. This alignment ensures that communication is not merely a support function but inevitable part of the Programme implementation.

Interact's success hinges on effective communication with its target groups, supported by comprehensive documents like the Interreg Brand Strategy and Design Manuals, which articulate the programme's vision of cross-border cooperation and ensure consistent brand visibility. The Interact IV Communication Strategy further refines this framework by introducing two distinct brand personas to target different audiences and enhance Interact's visibility. Strategic use of these personas, especially in high-profile initiative like Interreg Cooperation Day, demonstrates how branding and outreach efforts engage broader audiences and reinforce the programme's mission.

The effectiveness of communication tools and approaches was investigated by 2023 Interact Use and satisfaction survey, which highlighted strong approval for the Visibility as well as Communication Approach categories. Stakeholders praised the clarity and relevance of communication formats, noting their role in keeping programmes informed and engaged, although the Interact website, received the lowest satisfaction scores. In the meantime, it has been redesigned and new site was launched in 2024, while some improvements are still ongoing to enhance user experience.

The Evaluation survey revealed that communication preferences among Interact's target groups vary considerably depending on professional roles and institutional contexts. The Newsflash emerged as the most preferred tool across nearly all segments, with particularly strong support from respondents involved in Macro-regional Strategies (MRS) and Sea Basin Strategies, while social media showed minimal relevance for most groups, including those in programme management and finance. Only communication professionals demonstrated a somewhat higher interest in social media, though even within this group, usage remained below 20%. These findings suggest that communication efforts should be more strategically segmented, aligning tools and channels with the specific needs and habits of distinct user categories. There might be a need to reassess the effort invested in social media, potentially reducing or refining published content to better align with audience preferences.

Surveys remain a vital tool for capturing user perspectives and informing service improvements, and their value is evident in the feedback gathered through Interact's recent efforts. However, the analysis highlights several areas where survey design could be strengthened to improve clarity, relevance, and response quality. Ambiguous terminology and limited guidance often led participants to misinterpret questions or provide off-topic input, reducing the usefulness of the data. Limited representativeness risk skewing results toward overly positive perceptions. Moreover, the diversity of target groups complicate survey design, as many respondents lack experience with certain services, resulting in irrelevant answers and survey fatigue. Open-ended responses further revealed a need for clear framing. To ensure more focused and actionable insights, future survey instruments should be refined and tailored to better reflect the varied experiences of target audiences.

The findings highlight the need to strengthen both the analysis and dissemination of survey results to fully realize their strategic value. Without a functioning feedback loop, key stakeholders, particularly those responsible for service delivery, are left without the insights needed for continuous improvement. Additionally, the lack of systematic data on under-engaged programmes limits understanding of barriers to participation, such as resource constraints or language issues. To support more inclusive cooperation and improve service

delivery across all stakeholder groups, future efforts should build on the European Commission’s existing insights into programme performance and known bottlenecks.

4. Lessons learned and recommendations

Based on the conclusions the following set of Lessons Learned and recommendation should be considered.

4.1 Lessons learned

The Interact IV Programme aims to strengthen institutional capacity, yet slight variations in how this objective is expressed across documents highlight the need for consistency across documents to support a coherent intervention logic. Properly structured intervention logic distinguishing between activities and outputs would also enable easier identification of appropriate output and result indicators. Consistency in how objectives are stated in all relevant Programme documents and how is logframe presented is therefore critical for effective monitoring and evaluation. Aligning the wording and harmonisation across all key documents would help eliminate interpretative ambiguity and strengthen the programme's overall evaluability. Moreover, it would contribute to greater transparency and help stakeholders better understand the strategic direction and intended impact of the programme.

To strengthen evaluability and transparency, Interact should ensure that the wording of the objectives across all key documents is aligned and harmonized, ensuring a coherent intervention logic with clear output and result indicators.

Selecting a result indicator from the predefined set of common indicators can be challenging, as these may not fully reflect the specific objective of the Interact Programme, which aims to achieve behavioural change rather than simply count certified graduates. For future programming if the same indicator is retained, clarify that it primarily captures intermediate effects. Meanwhile, Interact-specific result indicators, measured through post-programme surveys, focus on the use of acquired knowledge, skills, and solutions, though stakeholders often struggle to distinguish between these terms, and the source of enhanced institutional capacity (whether from knowledge, skills, or solutions) is not a fundamentally meaningful distinction.

To strengthen future programming, Interact should consider consolidation of their result indicators into a single measure capturing the combined use of knowledge, skills, and solutions.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the above-mentioned conclusions the following measures are recommended:

Stakeholders' satisfaction with the services and tools offered by Interact has been consistently reaffirmed through multiple surveys. While overall satisfaction remains high, feedback from stakeholders included constructive comments and suggestions aimed at improving the uptake of the Interact Academy. A recurring theme in the feedback was the need for greater flexibility

in training delivery. Many stakeholders indicated that their professional commitments often prevent them from participating in scheduled training sessions, highlighting the importance of adapting formats and timing to better accommodate their needs.

To improve uptake of highly relevant services, Interact should offer more flexible training formats and schedules that better accommodate stakeholders' professional commitments.

To enhance stakeholder engagement and improve the quality of survey responses, Interact should adopt a mix of strategic and practical measures to strengthen its feedback mechanisms starting with shorter, clearer questionnaires using simplified terminology and closed questions to reduce confusion and fatigue. Leveraging newly introduced IT tools for stakeholder segmentation will enable more targeted outreach, with surveys distributed selectively to those directly involved or interested in specific activities, thereby avoiding broad, unfocused sampling and mitigating selection bias. Each proper survey should be systematically analysed and shared not only with the Monitoring Committee but also with Interact staff to support service refinement and internal learning. For routine activities with stable feedback patterns, simplified post-event surveys can be made more engaging through visuals and interactive elements, such as emojis (see Picture 5) or quick polls without any other questions, and seamlessly integrated into online event exits. In contrast, newly introduced or evolving services require more tailored survey design and focused outreach to ensure that stakeholder input effectively informs future improvements.

Picture 5 Post-event surveys – emojis

To enhance stakeholder engagement and response quality, Interact should:

- *streamline surveys with clearer, targeted questions;*
- *use IT tools for selective outreach;*
- *share analysed results with both the Monitoring Committee and staff; and*
- *tailor survey formats - simplified for routine activities and more focused for evolving services - to ensure meaningful input and continuous improvement.*

To address the structural and governance challenges within the Interact Programme, it should be considered to adopt formally the pending internal procedures and integrate them into a binding governance framework that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, and escalation pathways across its multi-layered structure. This would reduce ambiguity, improve decision-making, and enhance coordination among Hosting Institutions and Interact Offices. Strengthening the leadership and strategic mandate of the Coordination Board, led by the Managing Authority, is also essential for maintaining coherence as the Programme expands. In parallel, harmonising human resource management through standardised role definitions, including better alignment of Horizontal Managers' responsibilities with their actual functions as well as performance protocols with key indicators, could support managerial consistency. Introduction of informal Deputy roles for Heads of Interact Offices may facilitate daily

management burden of the Heads of IOs, embedding these principles into governance and HR systems should help Interact remain resilient and responsive, especially as it prepares to support external border programmes and enlargement countries without compromising service quality.

To address structural and governance challenges, Interact should formally adopt pending procedures into a binding framework, strengthen Coordination Board leadership, and harmonise HR practices to ensure clarity, consistency, and resilience as the Programme expands.

To build on its strengths and address identified challenges, the Interact Programme should further invest in streamlining its monitoring, reporting, collaboration, and decision-making processes by fully leveraging the capabilities of its newly introduced IT platform. Automating data collection and verification where possible would significantly reduce the resource burden and improve efficiency. Additionally, enhancing the platform's analytical functions could support more dynamic reporting and allow for real-time insights into service uptake and stakeholder engagement. This would enable Interact to better tailor its support to the differentiated needs of target groups and improve strategic decision-making.

To boost efficiency of monitoring and strategic impact, Interact should fully utilize its new IT platform by introducing knowledge management system, automating data processes and enhancing analytics for real-time monitoring, tailored reporting and decision-making.

To strengthen the strategic effectiveness of its Communication Strategy, Interact should embrace a more segmented, data-informed outreach approach that aligns tools and channels with the varied preferences of its target audiences. In light of the strong preference for the Newsflash and the limited relevance of social media among many professional groups, resources should be redirected to enhance high-impact formats while simplifying social media activities. The upcoming update of the strategy should also incorporate evolving stakeholder needs, the changing communication landscape, and the capabilities introduced by new IT tools, including enhancements to the Interact web portal.

To strengthen its Communication Strategy, Interact should:

- *adopt a segmented, data-driven outreach approach,*
- *prioritize high-impact formats like the Newsflash,*
- *streamline social media use, and*
- *integrate new digital tools.*

Ambiguities and unclear terminology in key concepts have been observed and can be addressed by providing a glossary of definitions. The glossary should present Interact terms in plain, accessible language to help participants better understand the types of services available, their categorization, and expected outcomes. In the context of surveys, a clearer glossary would also support comprehension of the questions, minimize confusion and promote more accurate, focused responses. These improvements would enhance data consistency.

To enhance service comprehension, minimize confusion, and support more accurate and relevant survey responses, Interact should expand and refine its glossary of definitions with clear, accessible explanations of key terms.

Finally, to address the unclear reasons behind limited engagement from certain programmes, Interact should initiate targeted dialogues with underrepresented groups, supported by information from the European Commission. These conversations can help uncover specific barriers, whether linguistic, financial, or operational. The EC's insights into programme performance strengths and gaps can help shape more tailored support strategies. Interact can foster more inclusive cooperation and ensure that its services remain relevant and accessible across the full spectrum of the Interreg community.

To foster inclusive cooperation and service relevance, Interact should initiate targeted dialogues with underrepresented programmes based on the European Commission's insights into their performance strengths and challenges to uncover specific barriers and tailor support.

Annexes

Annex 1 List of evaluation tasks, questions and sub-questions

In Task 1 the evaluation is expected to appraise the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme's operational implementation. The aim is to assess how the programme is progressing in attaining the target values, identify any deviations and recommend changes to ensure best delivery of the programme by the end of the period. Task 1 should provide answer to the following main question: ***Is the programme implementation well on track for achieving the programme objectives?***

The sub-questions for Task 1 were set out as follows:

1. Where is Interact in terms of achieving the result and output indicators? Are there any deviations (positive/negative) in how Interact progresses in the achievement of the result and output indicators?
2. Are there any changes necessary in terms of the focus of the programme's activities? If so, what will be the consequences in view of reaching the programme objectives if they are not implemented?
3. To what extent do the products and services of Interact, especially OSIs, meet the needs of the intended users?
4. What could/should be done to increase the use of products and services provided by Interact? Are the methods of service delivery aligned with the needs and expectations of our stakeholders?
5. What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of the programme thus far and what are the recommendations for the future? Specifically, for the performance framework output and result indicator system), what improvements can be recommended to better capture the programme's impact?

Task 2 concerns the Interact management system and is expected to appraise the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme design and management structures by looking at how the organisational set-up and management structures support the programme implementation and achievement of the programme objectives. The main question to address by the evaluators is determined as: ***Is the programme management system designed and used in an effective and efficient way in order to allow reaching the programme objectives?***

Within Task 2, the evaluation is expected to answer the following evaluation sub-questions:

1. How does the programme organisational set-up and related management structures (their design and use) support an effective and efficient service delivery?
2. To what extent the processes and procedures to develop products and services are involving Interact programme bodies? (e.g. MA, EC, MC and Interact Offices). To what extent are the processes and procedures for monitoring the implementation of operations transparent, effective and compliant?
3. To what extent the processes and procedures to develop products and services are involving Interreg programmes?
4. To what extent and how does the Joint service delivery principle (referred to Strategic Implementation document section 6) support an effective and efficient delivery of the

programme? What improvements can be recommended to optimise the collaboration across offices?
5. How effective and efficient is the decision-making process involving the programme bodies? How decisions are made, communicated, implemented and followed-up?
6. Is the internal and external feedback collected and followed up in a way that ensures the programme objectives are reached?
7. What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of the programme in the 2021-2027 period and what are the recommendations for the future (post 2027)?

Task 3 is envisaged to assesses the Communication Strategy and effectiveness and efficiency of the operational implementation of the programme communications. The aim of the task is to assess how the Communication Strategy supports communications about Interact and the programme promotion. The main question to be addressed and responded by the evaluation is: ***What is the progress in the implementation of the Interact communication strategy and achievement of the communication objectives?***

The main question of Task 3 shall be answered through the assessment of the aspects specified by these sub-questions:
1. Are the objectives of the Communication Strategy set in a way to contribute to the programme's overall objectives and the three perspectives defined in the Interreg programme (Strengthening the capacity to work in cooperation programmes, Strengthening the management capacity of Interreg programmes, Strengthening the capacity to capture and communicate programme and project results and to increase visibility)?
2. Do they sufficiently expand Communication Chapter 5 of the Interact Programme Document?
3. How effective are the communication approaches, tools, and activities for reaching the communication objectives? What communication actions have been more effective and why? Which ones have failed and why?
4. How effective are Interacts' communication flows with its main target audiences, set out in 5.1 of the Communication Strategy? Are the programme's communication measures effective in reaching the relevant target groups? How effectively are the various channels of communication used?
5. How effective and efficient are the communication approaches in reaching other target audiences (Communication Strategy Chapter 5.2 and 5.3, and Interact Programme Document 2.1.1.3)? How does the programmes communication approach support those more directly involved in these activities?

The evaluation questions form the overarching frame for the operational evaluation while the identified sub-questions further specify topics that are of particular interest to the Interact programme bodies.

Annex 2 Indicators

The service delivery will be carried out by means of "products and services" that include collaborative actions involving Interreg programmes and other cooperation actors, solutions developed by Interact together with the target groups, and trainings building knowledge and skills in specific topics

Output indicators

Participations in joint actions across borders (RCO81)

The indicator captures the participations to joint **actions** implemented by Interact IV.
Joint actions by Interact have a cross border character as they involve representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders working across borders.

- Targeted events (conferences, seminars, workshops)
- Meetings to network/exchange experiences/harmonise approaches
- On-demand advisory meetings
- Other events organised by Interact (e.g.; peer-to-peer exchange visits).

Participations in joint training schemes (RCO85)

The indicator captures the participations to joint **training schemes** implemented by Interact IV. Training schemes by Interact have a cross border character as they involve representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders working across borders.

- In-situ/online training events. Compared to joint actions, training events focus on teaching of specific knowledge and skills. They include practicing, i.e.; use exercises and simulations to promote application of the content to job tasks.
- Online learning courses. They combine online educational materials and opportunities for interaction. Compared to training events, online learning courses are generally self-paced and can be conducted any time and place.
- Other training programmes (e.g.; blended learning combining online learning activities with face-to-face interaction).
- Training schemes **do not include** online tutorials, individual training sessions, on-demand advisory meetings and other types of services **– if there is no certificate issued**

Jointly developed solutions (RCO116)

The indicator captures the joint solutions provided by Interact IV.
Solutions by Interact have a cross border character as they are produced with the engagement of representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders working across borders, either during the design (e.g. needs assessment) or development process.

- Harmonised templates for programme implementation and management
- Guidance documents, clarification fiches
- Repositories of practices/results
- Web tools supporting programme management, communication and visibility
- Targeted promotional campaigns
- Other solutions offered by Interact.

The indicator counts the number of tools as a means of solving a problem, dealing with a challenge, facilitating management of programmes/cooperation actions or communication on cooperation results, etc. It measures tools that are newly developed and those significantly refined provided they offer a new solution.

Result indicators

Completion of joint training schemes (RCR81)

The indicator captures the participants completing the joint training schemes implemented by Interact IV.
Specifically, it counts the number of certificates of training completion issued to participants of training events, online learning courses or other training programmes offered by Interact IV.

Institutions using knowledge/skills acquired through Interact services (Interact-specific)

The indicator captures the institutions (i.e.; bodies involved in the implementation of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actions) declaring as having used the **knowledge/skills** acquired through Interact IV **services.**
The indicator is counted as the percentage of recipients of Interact IV services that report they directly applied or used for inspiration knowledge/skills acquired thanks to Interact that resulted in changes to working practice or changes of perception/thinking in the work.

Institutions using solutions developed through Interact services (Interact-specific)

The indicator captures the institutions (i.e.; bodies involved in the implementation of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actions) declaring as having used the **solutions** provided by Interact IV.
The indicator counts the percentage of recipients of Interact IV services that report they adopted or used for inspiration **solutions** provided by Interact that resulted in changes to working practice or changes of perception/ interpretation/ thinking in the work.

Annex 3 Terminology

While activities and deliverables are mentioned in the logframe together, the intervention logic rules assume transfer of inputs by the activities to outputs (deliverables). Therefore, it would make sense to distinguish the two categories:

Activities	Deliverables
• *Events: conferences, seminars and workshops (in-situ, online)* • *Advisories/tailor made support services to programmes/ MSs* • *Peer-to-peer exchange visits* • *Meetings to exchange experiences/ harmonise approaches* • *Exchange networks (experts, thematic) facilitated through online communities and/or meetings* • *Training schemes: in-situ/online events, courses in the online learning platform, blended learning* • *Liaison with European Commission* • *Establishing links/ nurturing connections with actors involved in the management and implementation of cooperation frameworks/ instruments* • *Testing innovative concepts for management and implementation/set-up of programmes* • *Facilitation of Interreg joint promotional campaigns*	• *Harmonised templates, guidance documents, clarification fiches, repositories of practices/ results* • *Web tools for management and implementation (e.g. modules of the Interact online monitoring system)* • *Web training tools* • *Targeted promotional campaigns/ participation (on-line, in situ)* • *Tools for data collection and information on achievements on overall Interreg level*

The definition of service, event and tool is not provided, while products and solutions are defined in the methodology dealing with the indicators. However, there is further specification provided, e.g. several implementation modes of event are stated:

- *workshops,*
- *advisories,*
- *conferences,*
- *webinars,*
- *seminars,*
- *information sessions and/or*
- *question & answer sessions*.

Method for service delivery and knowledge transfer are also mentioned:

- *communities,*
- *networks and*
- *working groups*.

As mentioned above one of the methods for services delivery are communities, while at the same time the communities are described as *methods for capacity building and for pooling knowledge, by collecting people with a similar profile, those working in a similar capacity in different programmes, into one online environment.*

Joint actions are mentioned only in relation to the indicators, where *joint actions by Interact have a cross border character as they involve representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders*. Joint actions may be organised in-situ or online, and they include activities mentioned in the logframe such as:

- *targeted events (conferences, seminars, workshops)*
- *meetings to network/exchange experiences/harmonise approaches*
- *on-demand advisory meetings*
- *other events organised by Interact (e.g.; peer-to-peer exchange visits)*.

Training schemes appear among the activities and include:

- *in-situ/online training events. Compared to joint actions, training events focus on teaching of specific knowledge and skills. They include practicing, i.e.; use exercises and simulations to promote application of the content to job tasks.*
- *online learning courses. They combine online educational materials and opportunities for interaction. Compared to training events, online learning courses are generally self-paced and can be conducted any time and place*
- *other training programmes (e.g.; blended learning combining online learning activities with face-to-face interaction).*

The result indicators mention solutions with similar specification as joint actions, where *solutions by Interact have a cross border character as they are produced with the engagement of representatives of bodies implementing Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders working across borders, either during the design (e.g.; needs assessment) or development process*. Jointly developed solutions include:

- *harmonised templates for programme implementation and management*
- *guidance documents, clarification fiches*
- *repositories of practices/results*
- *web tools supporting programme management, communication and visibility*
- *targeted promotional campaigns*
- *other solutions offered by Interact*.

In this context it also specifies Joint service delivery - *Interact service delivery is based on joint preparation, implementation and follow up of the activities. In practice this means that Interact Team divides into the small implementation teams consisting of experts from different Interact Offices, who work together to deliver the service*.

The recipients of Interact IV service delivery include:

- *Managing Authorities*
- *Joint Secretariats*
- *National Controllers*
- *Bodies responsible for accounting function*
- *Audit Authorities*
- *Members of Monitoring Committees*
- *National/Regional Coordination Bodies*
- *National/Regional Contact Points*
- *Investment for Growth and Jobs (IGJ) implementing bodies*
- *Macro-region/Sea-basin Strategy implementing bodies*

- *Others (e.g.; European Commission, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), cooperation partners on specific themes including bodies involving cooperation projects, etc.)*

Interact defines its Operation of Strategic Importance (OSIs) as the tools it develops to promote harmonisation and simplification:

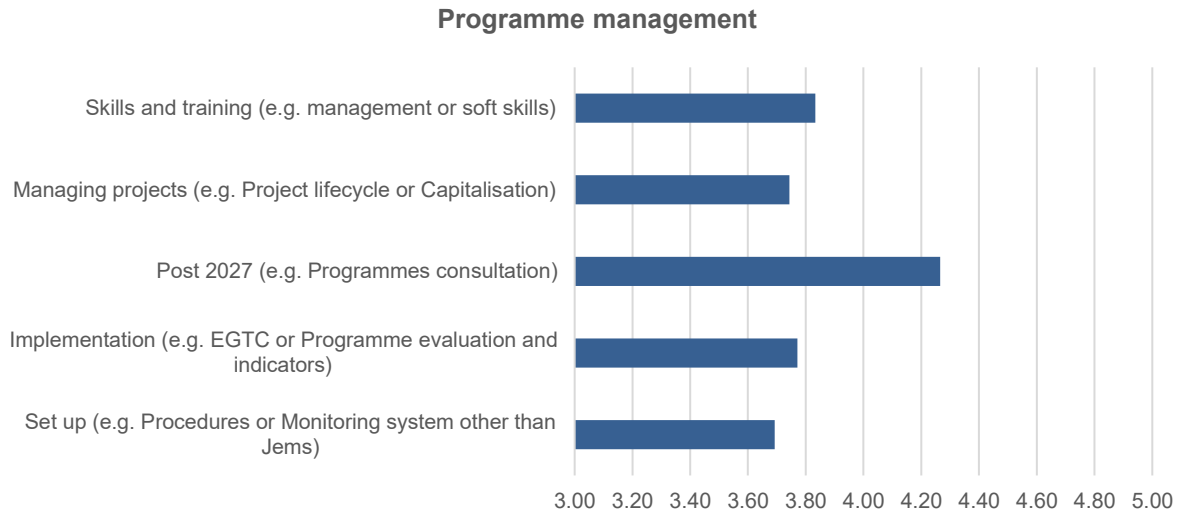
- *HIT*
- *Jems*
- *Index,*
- *Interact Academy,*

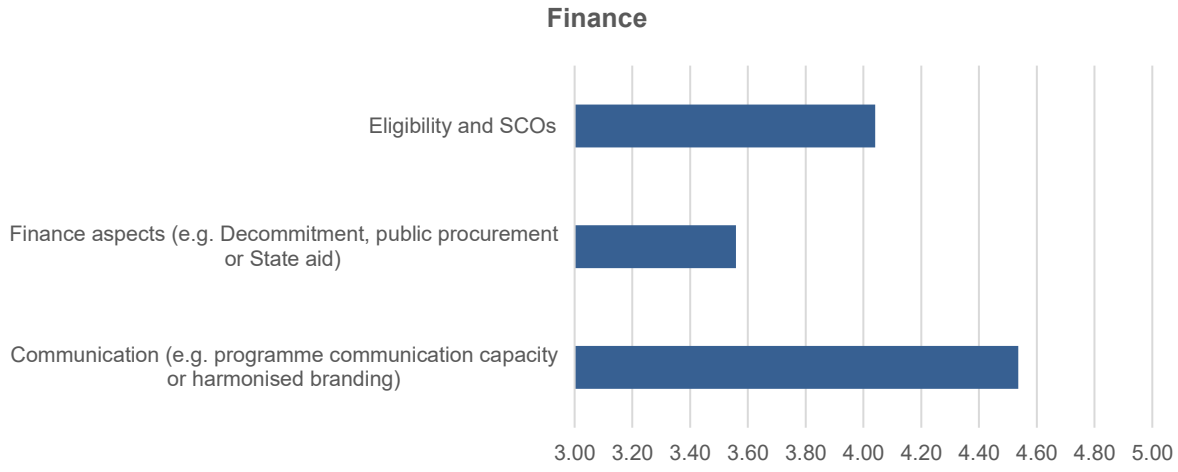
as well as tools that promote the achievement of Interreg:

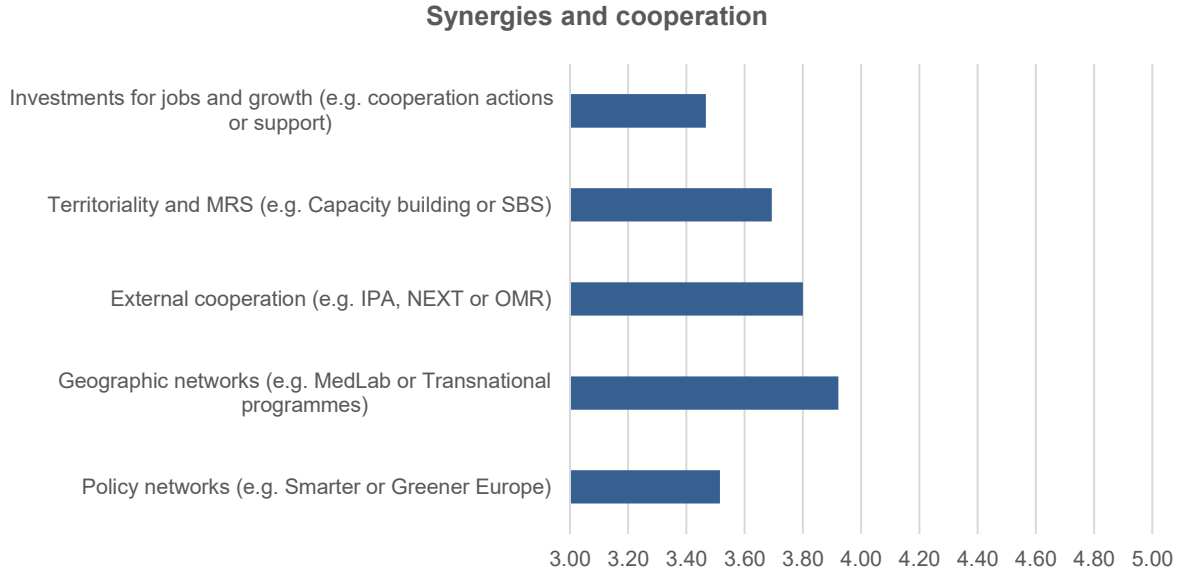
- *Interreg.eu,*
- *keep.eu*

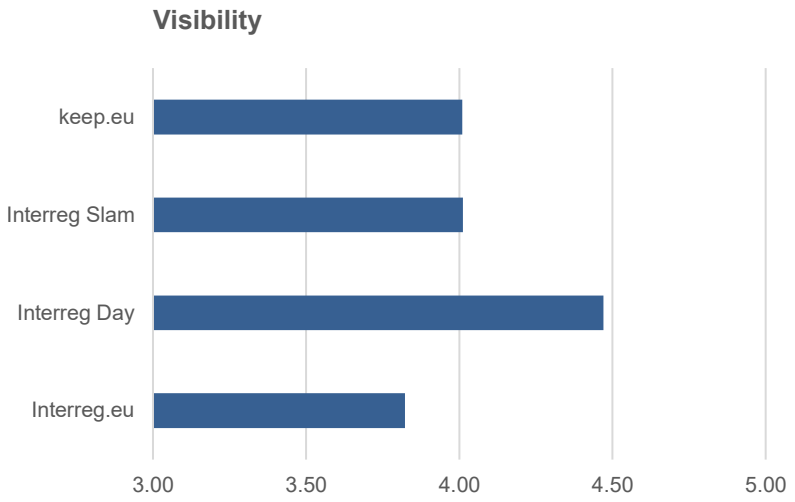
and other special formats of activities: Interreg Knowledge Fair.

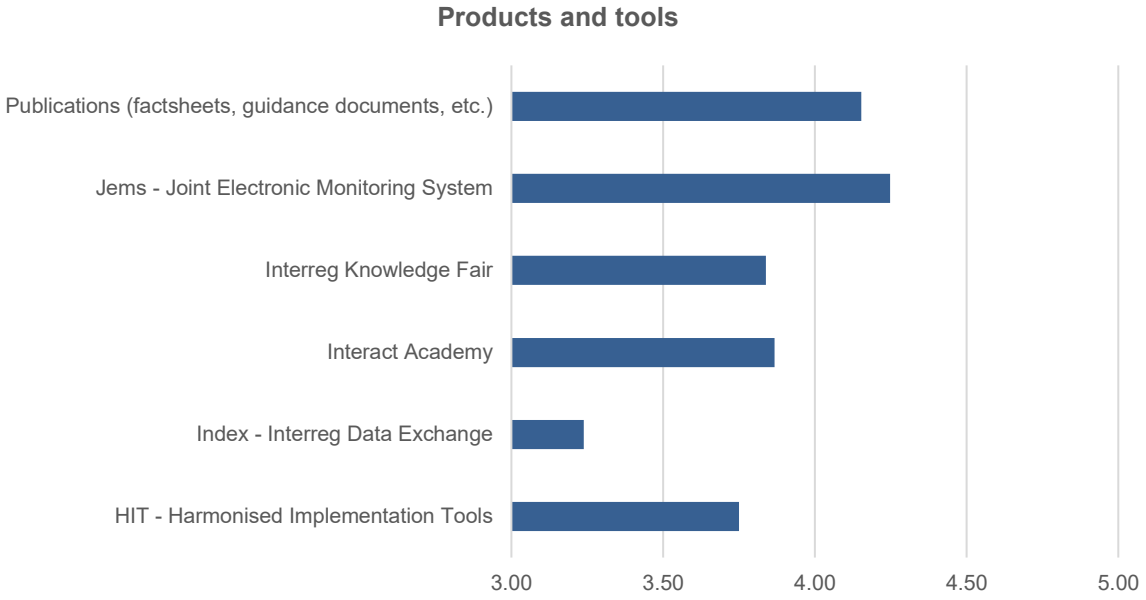
Annex 4 Results of the Use and satisfaction survey

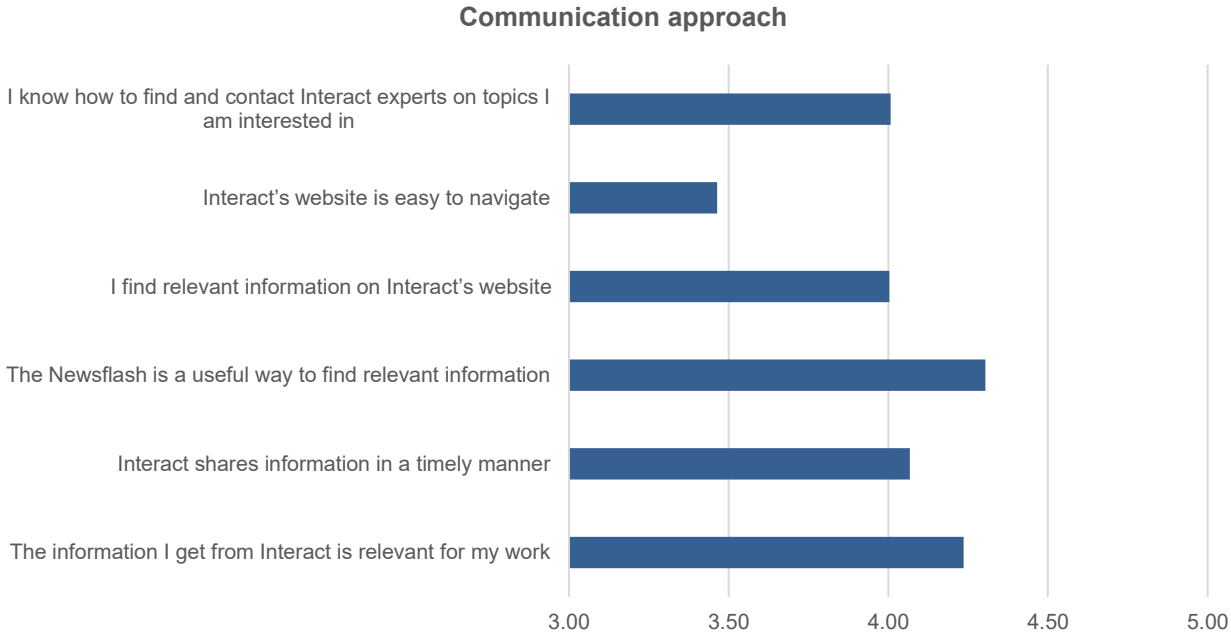


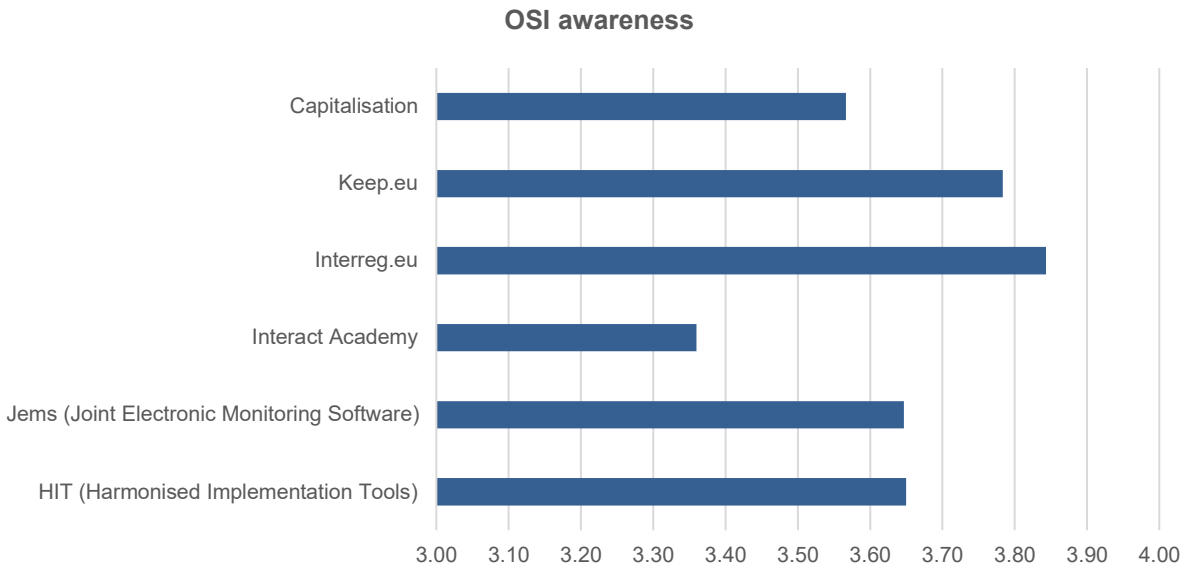




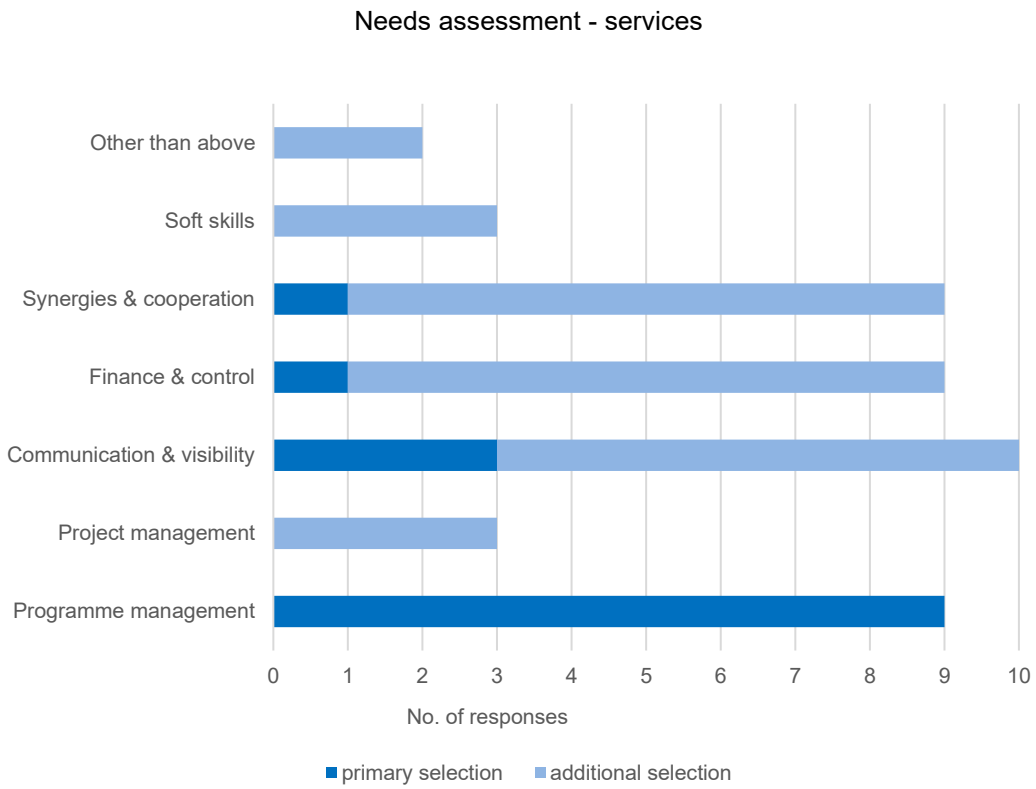

Visibility
keep.eu
Interreg Slam
Interreg Day
Interreg.eu
3.00
3.50
4.00
4.50
5.00


Products and tools
Publications (factsheets, guidance documents, etc.)
Jems - Joint Electronic Monitoring System
Interreg Knowledge Fair
Interact Academy
Index - Interreg Data Exchange
HIT - Harmonised Implementation Tools
3.00
3.50
4.00
4.50
5.00


Communication approach
I know how to find and contact Interact experts on topics I am interested in
Interact's website is easy to navigate
I find relevant information on Interact's website
The Newsflash is a useful way to find relevant information
Interact shares information in a timely manner
The information I get from Interact is relevant for my work
3.00
3.50
4.00
4.50
5.00


OSI awareness
Capitalisation
Keep.eu
Interreg.eu
Interact Academy
Jems (Joint Electronic Monitoring Software)
HIT (Harmonised Implementation Tools)
3.00
3.10
3.20
3.30
3.40
3.50
3.60
3.70
3.80
3.90
4.00

Annex 5 Needs assessment



Summary of Stakeholder Needs and Preferences

1. Programme Management & Strategic Topics

- Focus on novelties of 2021–2027 and Commission feedback on programme relevance.
- Interest in indicators, shared rules, and harmonised understanding across programme bodies.
- Preferred formats: written materials (guidance documents, templates), training programmes, advisory services, online events and networks (especially for MAs).

2. Project Management

- Need for training on new tools and strategies.
- Desire to establish thematic networks (e.g. environment, energy, social innovation).
- Interest in advanced-level exchanges for experienced staff.
- Preferred formats: events and workshops, written materials, training programmes, advisory services.

3. Communication & Visibility

- Continue campaigns like Interreg.eu and Cooperation Day.

- Support for storytelling, copyright guidance, and campaign planning.
- Value in cross-cutting transnational events and internal coordination meetings.
- Preferred formats: guidance documents, templates, training programmes, advisory services, online and onsite events for communication officers.

4. Finance & Control

- Training for new controllers, management verification, and audit procedures.
- Need for case studies, FAQs, and best practices (e.g. decommitment, SCOs).
- Desire to continue and expand networks (e.g. financial managers, IPA controllers).
- Preferred formats: written materials, workshops and capacity-building events, advisory services, networks (online and in-person).

5. Synergies & Cooperation

- Strong interest in synergy-building across programmes and with external actors (e.g. LIFE, Horizon).
- Suggestions for a study on best practices and more content-based networking events. Themes include green transition, circular economy, IPR, and university-enterprise links.
- Preferred formats: networking events, written materials, advisory services, training programmes.

6. Soft Skills & Horizontal Topics

- Demand for training in AI, sustainability, event organisation, and presentation skills.
- Interest in team-building and inter-programme cooperation.
- Preferred formats: training programmes, online events, team-based workshops.

7. Forward-Looking Topics

- Interest in post-2027 reflections, including ideas for improving future regulations.
- Need for guidance on programme and project evaluation, with good practice sharing.

8. Suggestions for Interact Services

- Overall satisfaction with Interact's support.
- Specific suggestions include: in-person meetings for finance coordinators, finance camp" for beginners, continued trust and appreciation for existing services.

Annex 6 Evaluation survey

Questions:

Which entity do you work for?
- Interreg/ IPA/NEXT
- MRS/ Sea basin strategies
- Non-Interreg EU Fund

What is your main field of responsibility?
- Programme management planning/ implementation (select more options)
- Programme finance/ control
- Communication and visibility
- Other

How relevant for you are the following Interact products/services for you? (Most relevant, Less relevant, Not relevant)
- HIT (Harmonised Implementation Tools)
- Jems (Joint Electronic Monitoring System)
- Interact Academy
- Interreg Data Exchange (Index)
- Guidelines/ documents/ publications
- Keep.eu
- Interreg Knowledge Fair
- Interact.eu (web)
- Interreg.eu (web)/ Slam/ EU cooperation day

Do you lack any product/service that could be provided by Interact in 2026? (Y/N)

What is missing? ……

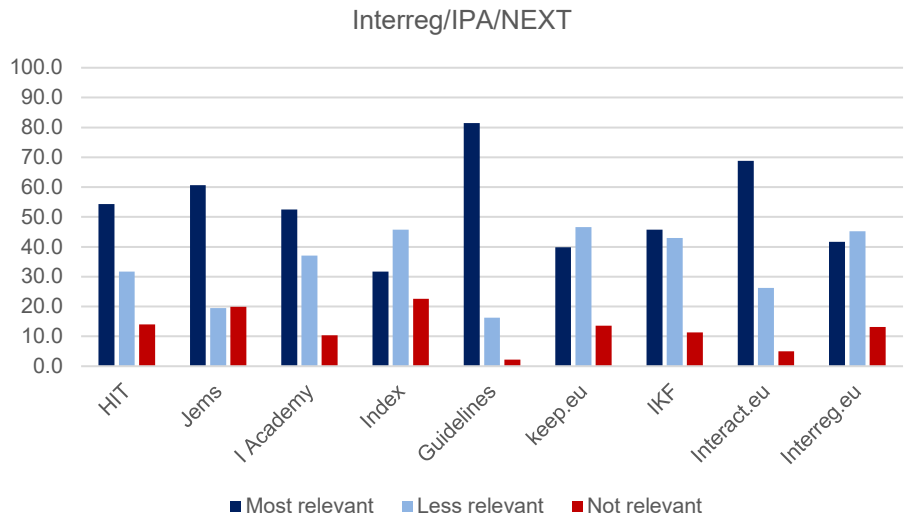
Are you satisfied with the methods of Interact product/ service delivery? (Y/Partly/N)

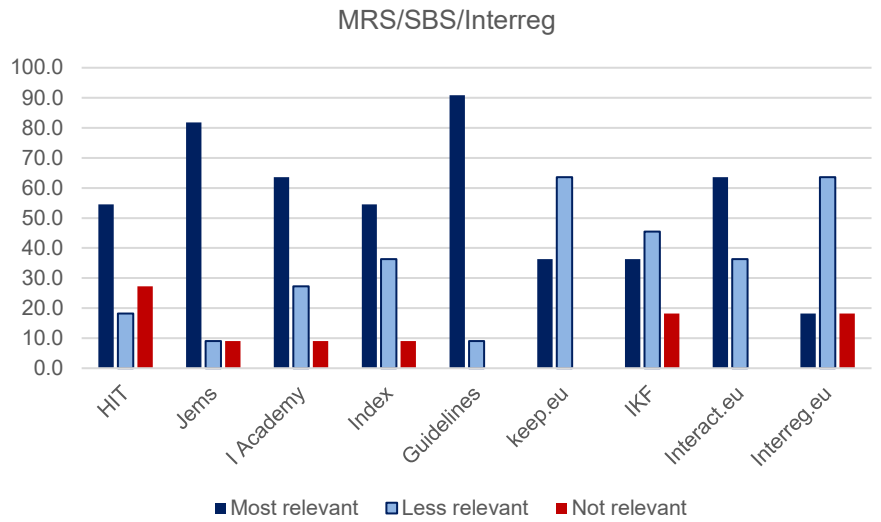
Your proposal for improvement / Which method would be better? ……

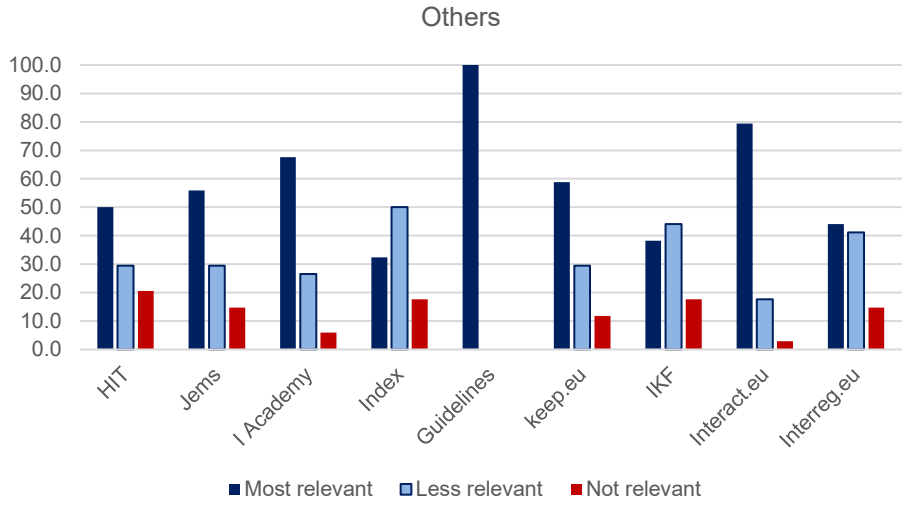
Is your Programme involved in Interact product/service development? (Y/N)

Which Interact communication tool is the most convenient for you? (select one)
- Interact web page (interact-eu.net)
- Newsflash/direct e-mail
- Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram Instagram, …

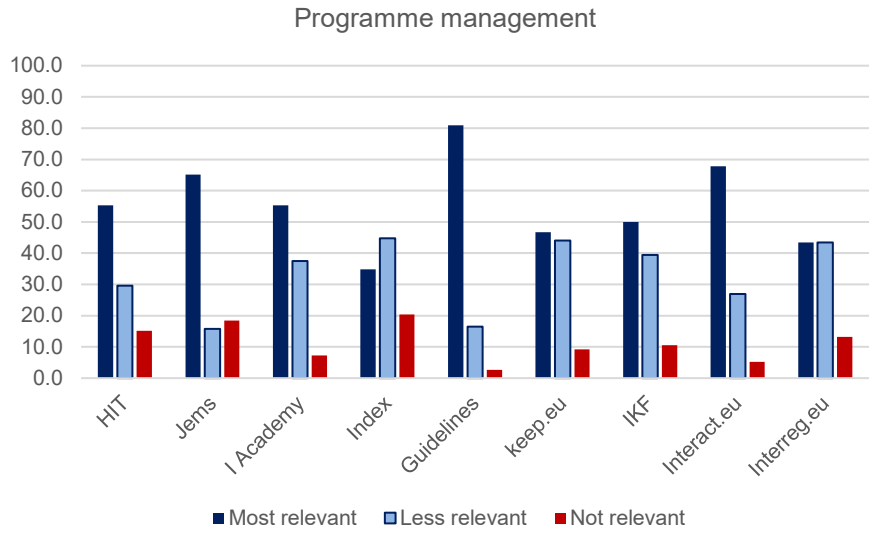
Graph 14 Relevance of services/tools – by entity

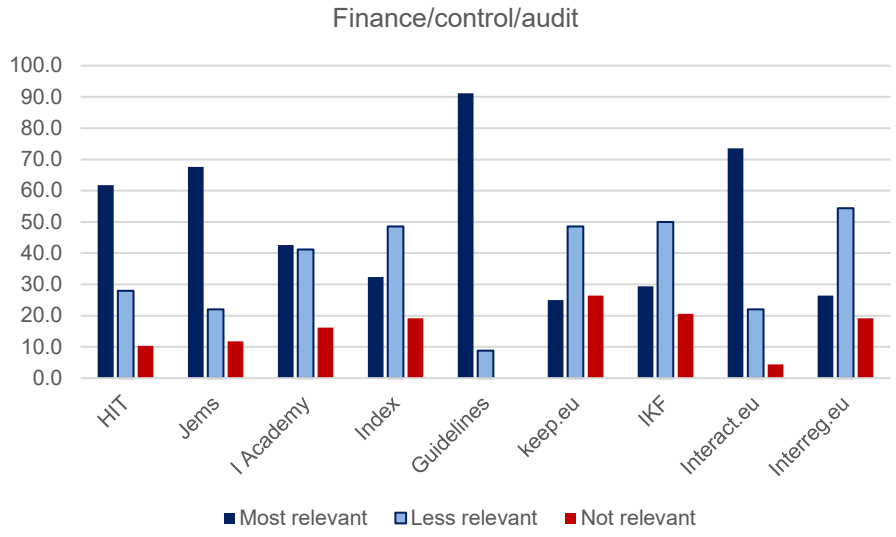


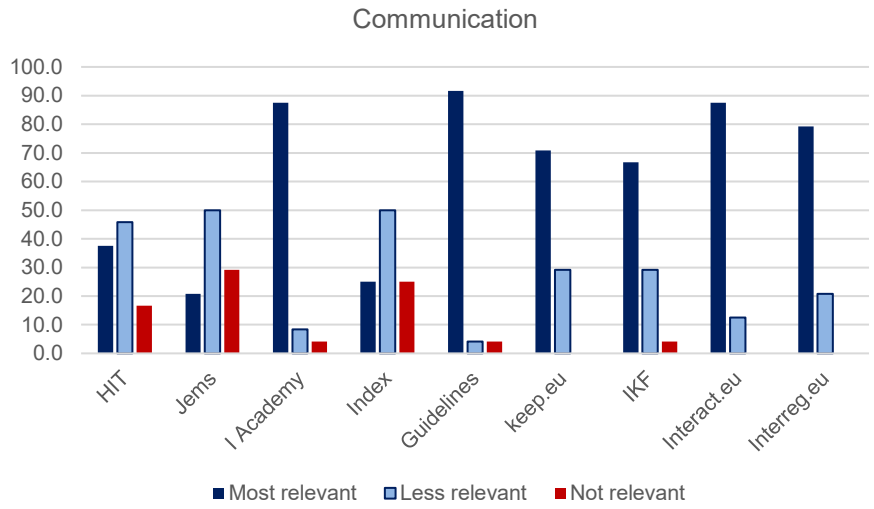


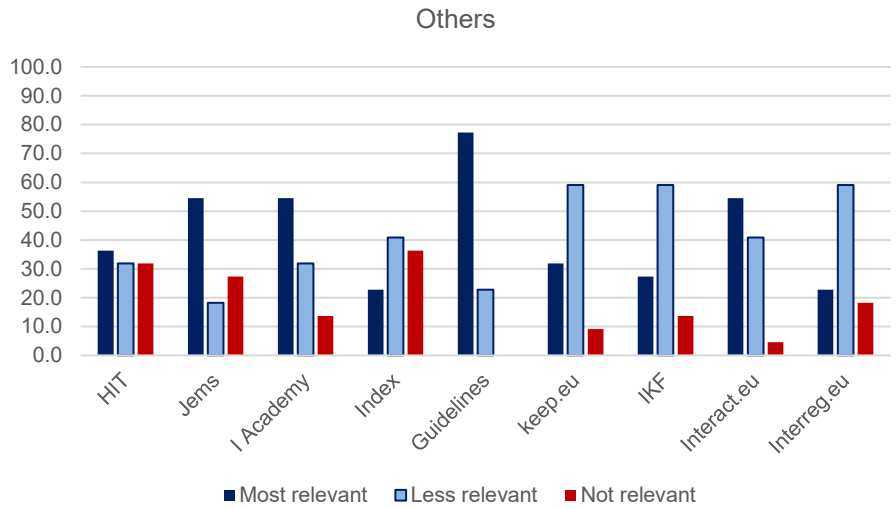


Graph 15 Relevance of services/tools – by profession



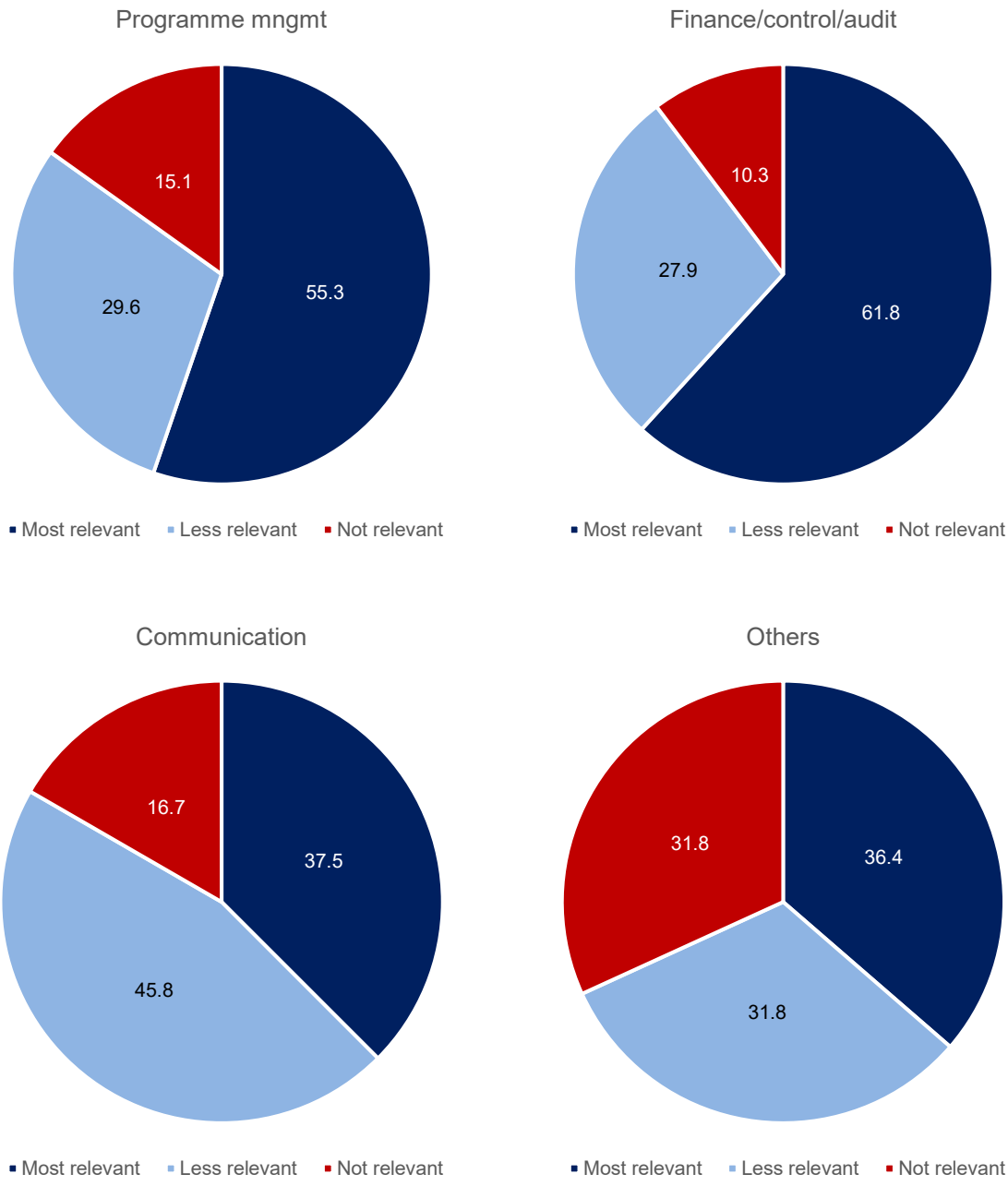




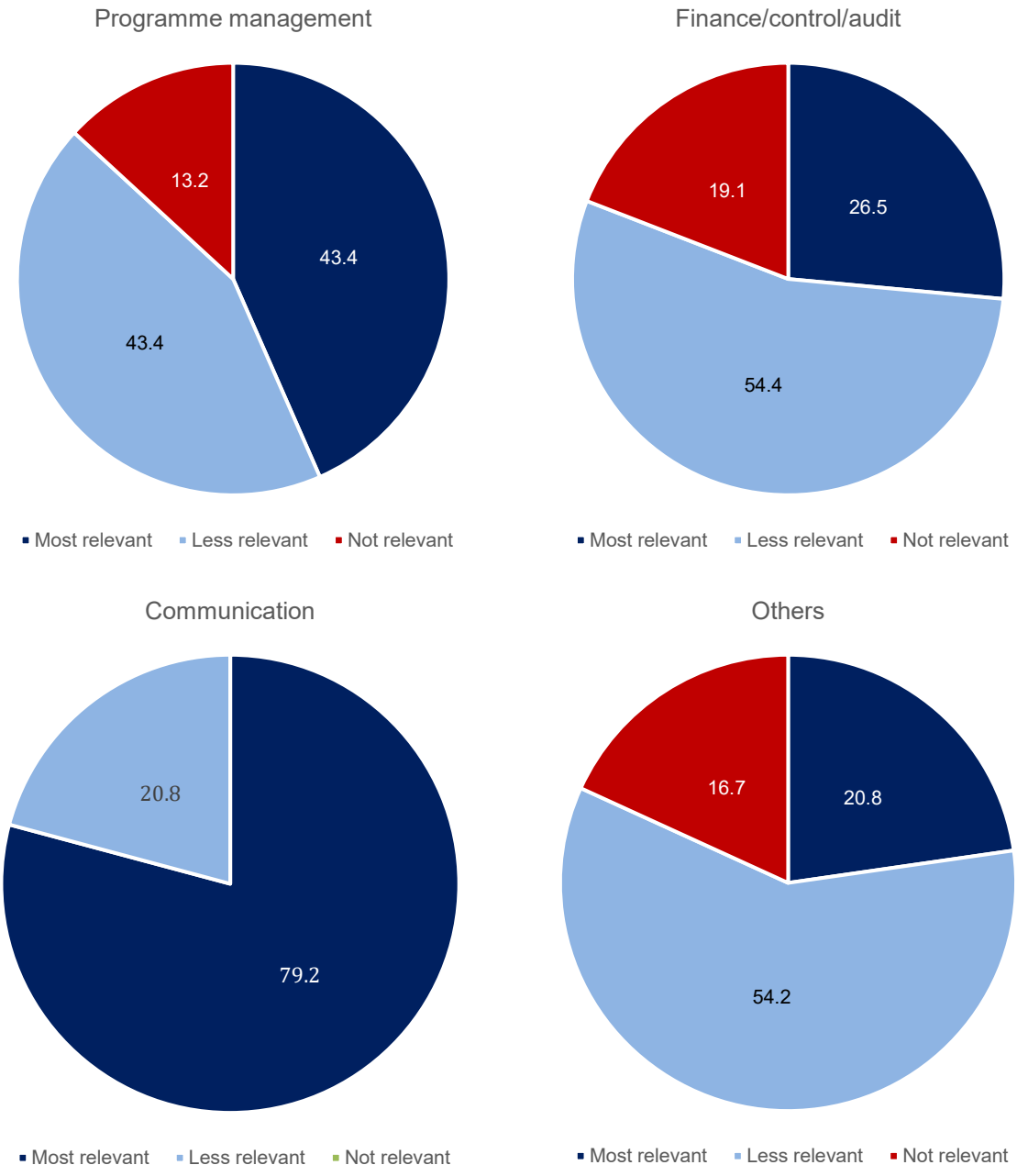


To demonstrate how perceptions of relevance differ according to respondents' institutional affiliation or professional background, several illustrative examples were chosen. These examples represent cases with the most pronounced differences, as highlighted in the accompanying pie charts.

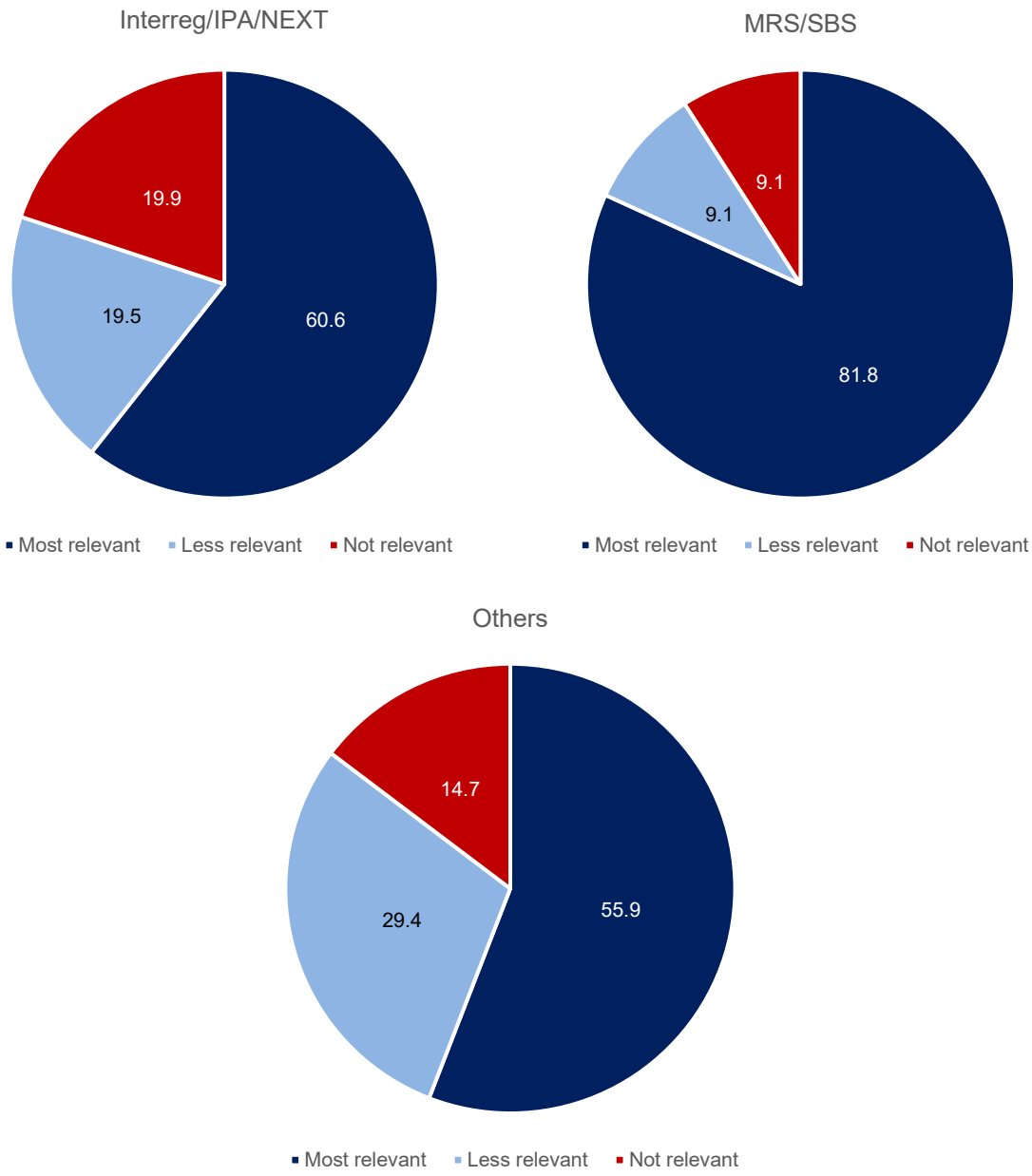
Graph 16 Relevance of individual services: HIT - by profession (n=266) in %



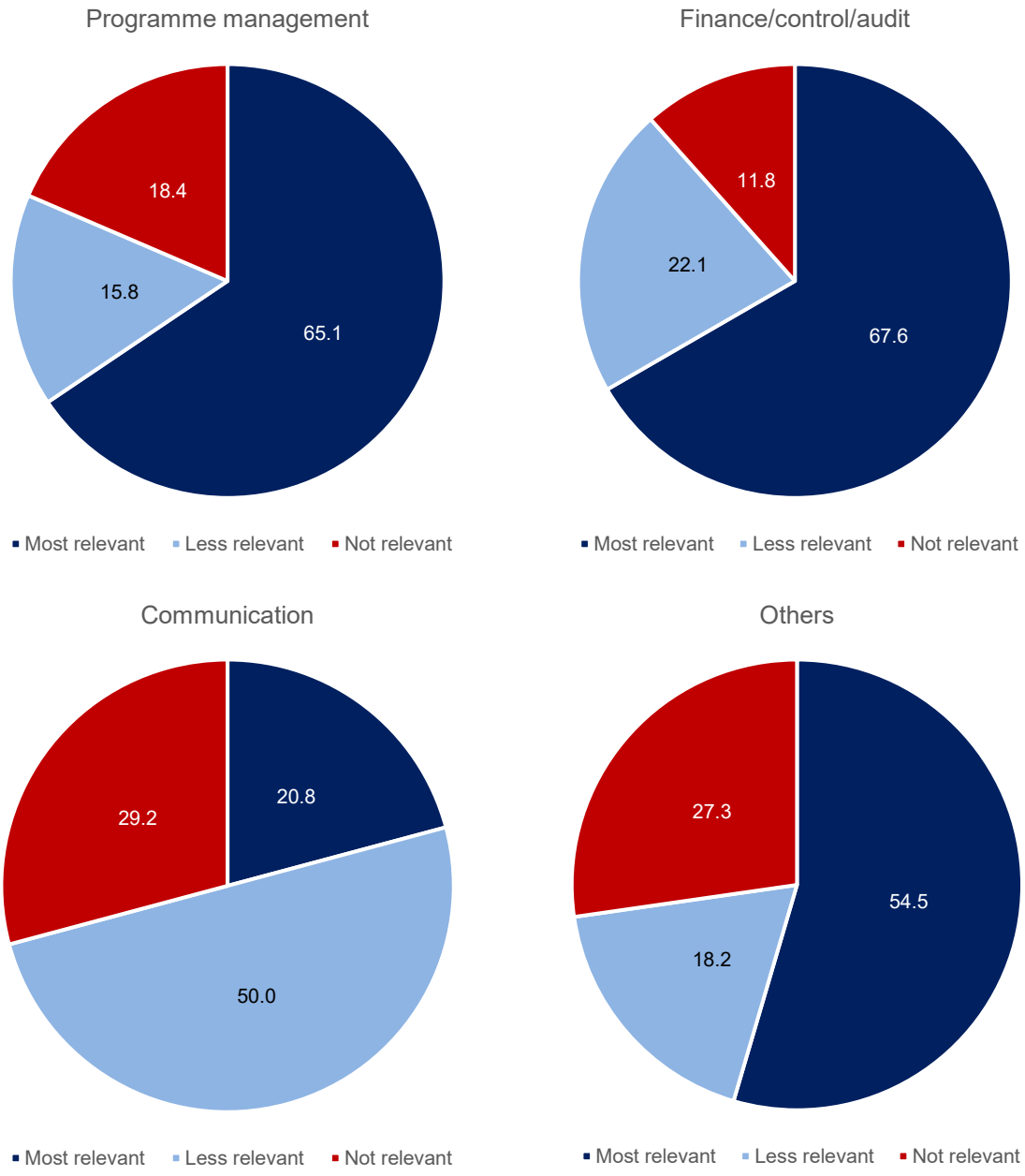
Graph 17 Relevance of individual services: Interreg.eu/Slam/EU cooperation day - by profession in %



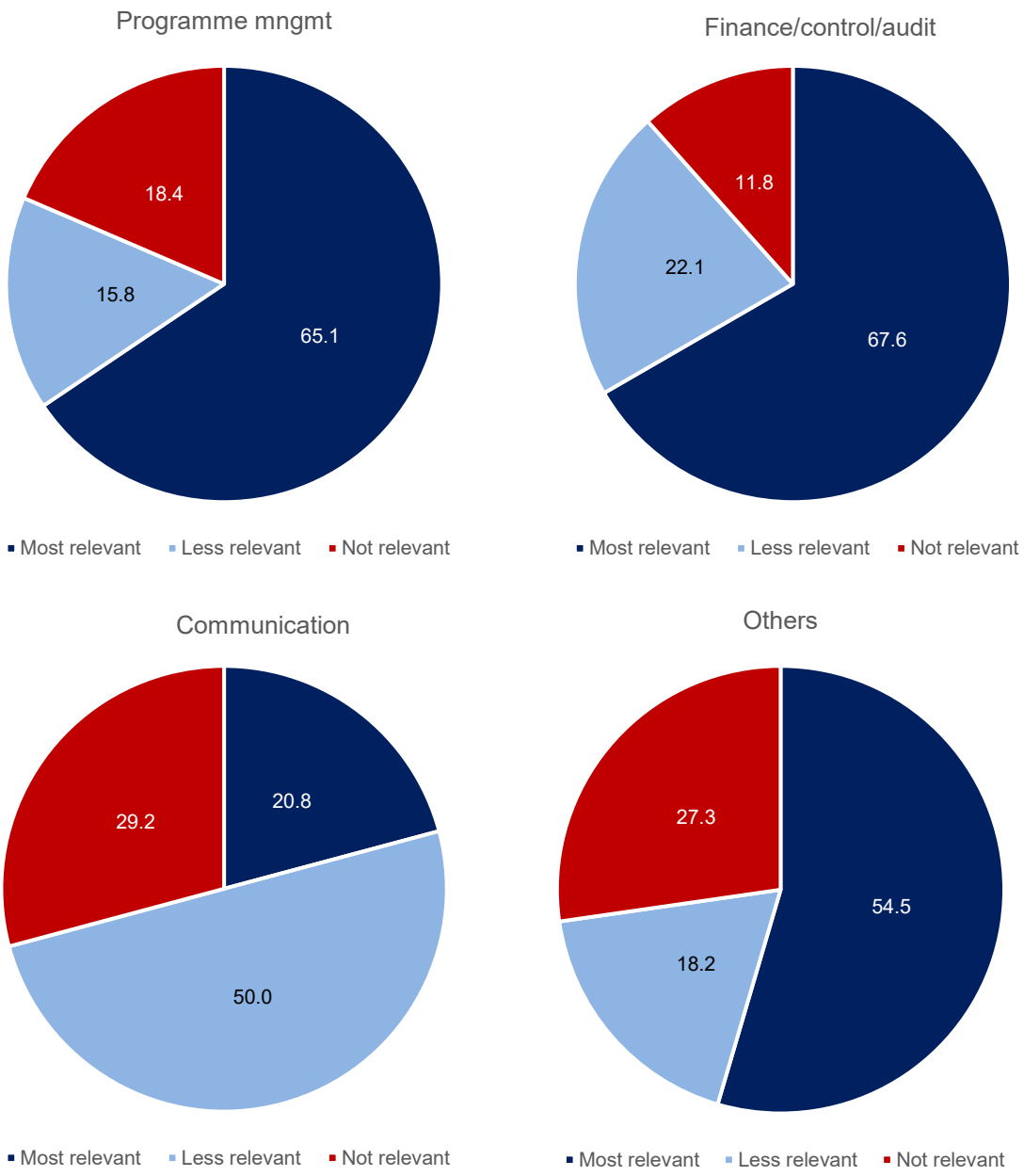
Graph 18 Relevance of individual services: Jems - by entity in %



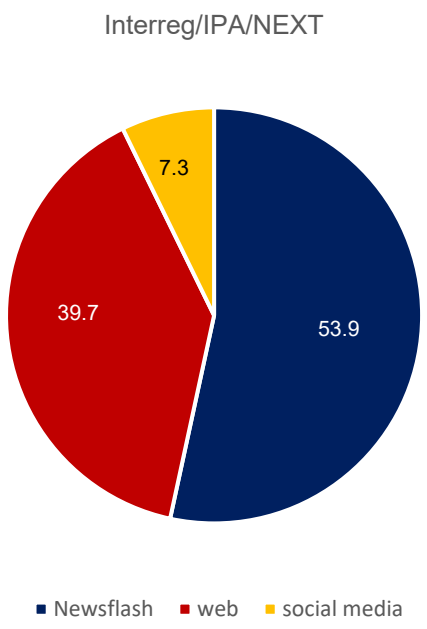
Graph 19 Relevance of individual services: Jems - by profession in %

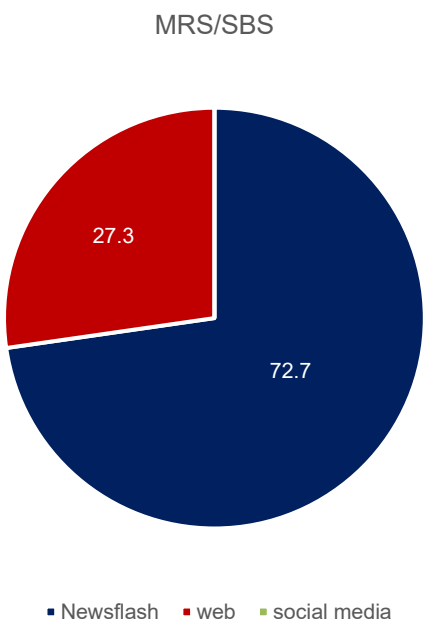


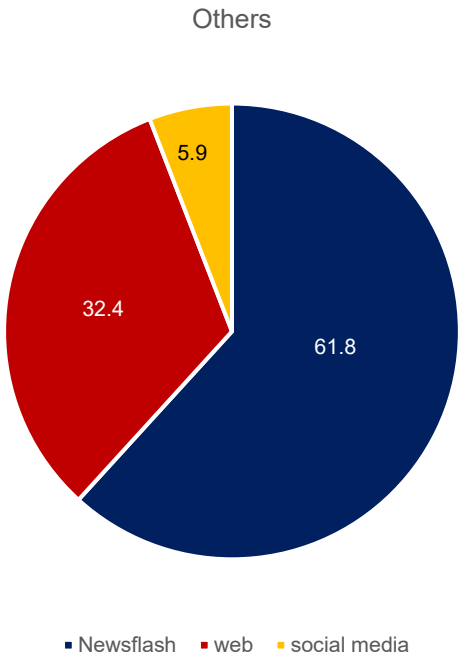
Graph 20 Relevance of individual services: Interact Academy – by profession in %



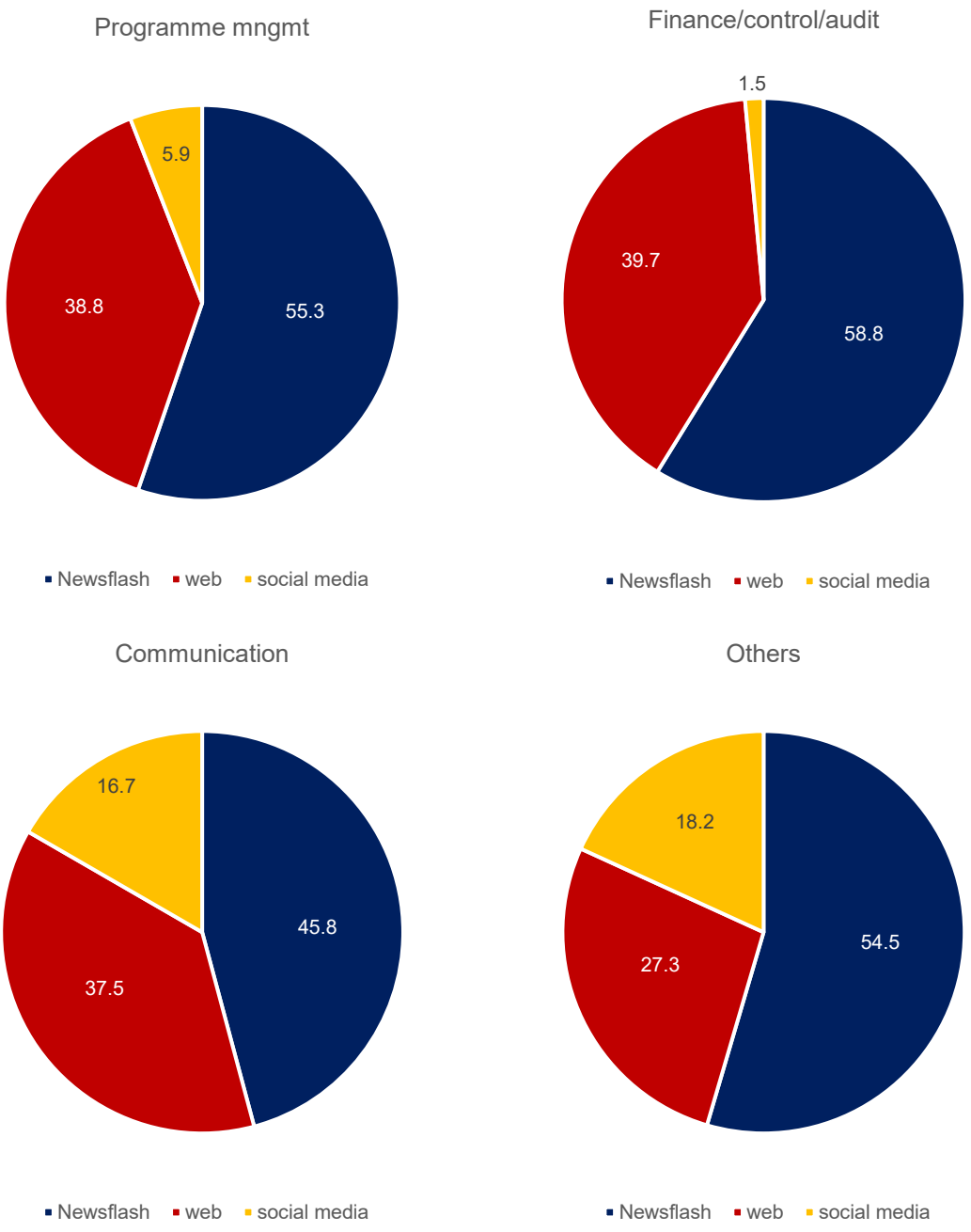
Graph 21 Communication tools - by entity in %







Graph 22 Communication tools – by profession in %



Responses to open questions

What is missing? (41 responses)

- Skilled contributions
- Assistance in asking questions to the EC
- Checklist for public procurement for Interreg programmes
- The experience exchange of National Contact Points is missing
- Job-shadowing opportunities will be valuable especially for smaller JS offices who could learn from colleagues
- Accounting, Flows if the Interreg/Interact funds...
- I miss the old Interact where we could learn. Now we have more networking events (which are useful) where we share our experience... But still sometimes we need instructions from your side :-)
- AI integrated tools also self-educational platforms
- At this time I have no observations
- Not missing, maybe detailed workshop/manual for programming, methodology for identification of measurable indicators
- Facilitating regular exchanges between programmes and MRS on embedding
- Continue to develop help with interpretation and acting as one collective voice towards COM, regarding solving/answers where regulations or national rules do not cover clarity in interreg context
- Academy
- More focus on project development and implementation.
- I would suggest increasing the sharing of best practices among Programmes; developing and implementing direct links between SFC and JEMs
- To reinforce dialogue with the European institutions in a more structured/permanent way and not only with DG Regio
- Joint efforts in capitalisation of Interreg results could be one example to name
- Some Jems functionalities
- Vocabulary
- People need trainings to be available for experts that have more than 5 years of experience in Interreg programmes. Many experts are not approved for trainings or meetings because in theory they are either too experienced or do not fit the "box" of the job description. Sometimes Interact misses the reality that some experts actually help and work on different fields in Interreg programmes irrelevant of their job description.
- Stress on finance etc. topics.
- Trainings is very relevant in topics indicated above - to be extended
- I am not familiar with Interreg 2026
- It is clear that the inherent specificity of each cooperation program is deeply influenced by the distinct national legal frameworks of the countries involved. We believe it would be highly beneficial if you could, in some manner, contribute to raising awareness among the relevant governments regarding the value and presence of these collaborative initiatives.
- More exchange options for NCPs
- Training/capacity building services and events

- More relevant topics to be covered regarding day-to-day activities on program implementation
- Even more targeted seminars/webinars, on projects' implementation, application of public procurement rules and their verification, etc.
- Checklists for audit of operations, in particular public procurement checklist with details for IPA partners
- Thematic working groups dedicated to project managers
- Trainings
- Stronger follow-up of the post 2027 legislation
- Further training on monitoring and evaluation
- More on capitalisation topic
- Legal expertise
- AI new opportunities
- More in-depth trainings, not such only for beginners
- A training session designed to provide participants with concrete guidance and instruction, rather than expecting them to reach solutions independently
- Shared institutions/organizations reference system and a unique ID for all the different systems (EU login?)

Your proposal for improvement / Which method would be better? (47 responses)

- Publications supporting regulations more precise and less vague, support in branding less shady
- The website and the 'intranet' are a bit confusing. Even as a programme employee, registering for and navigating the internal pages is not very intuitive
- More live events. Mostly programmes introduce their knowledge and not Interact
- Start including experts that have more experience in the Interreg programmes
- Ich habe keine Meinung
- More practical training
- Don't know
- To improve the way programmes could propose Jems improvements
- When it comes to tools and explanatory documents, you need to be earlier so it really helps programs
- More academic evaluation and research
- More direct meetings/trainings
- Start with EU COMM political guidelines, regulatives than programs
- Matching services with needs
- I cannot say
- The forums / message centre is not user friendly (even the new one)
- Directed information upon interest
- Not only exchange of practices but always teachers support to find solutions
- Not exclusively, but more events should be held online in order to utilise limited resources effectively when it comes to sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences
- More concrete seminars important for everyday work of MA/JS, less events for synergies, complementarities, capitalization, horizontal principles, etc.
- Some better communication with users

- Too many working groups are ongoing. The knowledge fair was supposed to face with this issue and now both are running...it is impossible to follow everything!
- Perhaps a more specific approach for each Region (all Interreg Programmes, similarities and differences) can be quite useful
- For us it is currently difficult to travel to Interact events therefore we prefer meetings in online format
- Sometimes I find them a little confusing, where do I look and what is offered
- Better visibility and use cases
- I would appreciate a clearer and more structured overview of what Interact offers. It might be helpful if the newsletters were a bit easier to navigate
- More solutions (proposals) developed by Interact and not based solely on sharing experience by the programmes
- Big network meetings on broad themes online is (in my personal opinion) not so rewarding
- Knowledge of what interact is offering as services/products
- Live sessions instead of online
- Online events and well planned hybrid events are great, and luckily the focus is on these. Well-planned hybrid events could still be increased, though. In person events should be highly justified and they really should be in easily accessible places, not requiring very long or complicated travels
- Improving data analysis and tools, improve direct support to the Programme in developing strategic actions, implement a direct support for embedding on Macro region and interregional cooperation with mainstream programme
- Focused working groups on specific topics seem to work the best when harmonising tools or providing feedback or good practices
- Transparency is often less than perfect and cooperation within Interact should be better to align products / services better
- Shorter sessions, end of day at 4 pm
- Necessary better communication, provide the funds for linking people who works on Interact programme (perdiems) and have opportunity to travel in other countries to learn from other practices which helps have wider knowledge and view of using different methods
- Network events
- All events should be available on streaming/interaction online

If you want, feel free to leave some comment bellow (26 responses)

- Thanks
- Not always mutual learning is a real learning. we appreciate very much all activities performed by your side, but it is necessary to give also specialized learning tools
- Thank you
- You are great and keep going :)
- Keep going, we are grateful for your work! :-)
- Our Programme thanks Interact for all their support, they're a great team
- I think you provide clear and user-friendly information both on your website and through newsflash.

- Keep up the good work!
- Thank you for all your work :)
- Newsflash: I like its structure and compilation of all relevant information (among other next events) because I seldom look each week for new events on the Website.
- Interact does many extremely important activities, and does them well. Some activities or services, however, seem to be less relevant and could be reviewed critically.
- Thanks for your work and cooperation with us!
- In the past HIT, Jems and Keep was the best developments by Interact.
- Thank you for your work!
- Thank YOU!!!
- Ich habe keine Meinung dazu
- I would like to say a big THANK YOU
- More interaction between interreg and mainstream (mixed events) could be considered for the future
- Maybe more certified courses that could help in starting or developing a career with EU projects (internal or external)
- It is suggested to widen the services/products dedicated to the AAs
- Overall high appreciation of Interact work.
- Thank you for your support
- Thank you, INTERACT! Keep listening, growing, cooperating, developing and Sharing Expertise!!!
- I would like to commend Interact Academy for delivering exceptionally informative and well-structured courses, providing opportunity to study the subject and to interact with peers
- It would be great if face to face events would be planned and communicated a bit more in advance. Sometimes it is really relevant to go bit the agenda is already full…
- Interact to speak the programme voice and not be the EC instrument as in the past.

Annex 7 Main features Programme vs Organisation

Table 5 Human Resource features Programme vs Organisation

Aspect	Programme	Organisation
Recruitment	Skills needed for specific projects or results.	Culture fit, long-term potential, and career growth.
Performance	Result-focused, short-term KPIs linked to programme goals.	Ongoing appraisal systems tied to job roles.
Training	Targeted, just-in-time learning for programme tasks.	Long-term professional development and growth.
Team	Cross-functional and fluid, often working across silos.	Stable teams, often aligned by departments.
Leadership	Programme managers may not have direct HR authority.	Clear line-management structures.

The flexibility can be very beneficial in complex, multi-country EU-funded programmes. However, the key challenges for Interact Programme are:

- Multi-Employer Governance:
  Staff from different institutions = different hierarchies, work cultures, and incentives. This requires creation of a binding inter-institutional agreement with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines.
- Consistency vs. Flexibility:
  Risk of misalignment between offices. To avoid it needs to use a unified Project Management Office function and shared tools for planning, progress tracking, and knowledge sharing.
- Communication and Decision-Making:
  Cross-border and multi-agency coordination slows decision-making. The Board as formal governance body helps and clear escalation paths.

Annex 8 List of people interviewed

Date	Name	Institution / Function	Note
7.3.2025	Petra Masácová	MA	
14.3.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová Szabolcs Csahók Evasen Naidoo Kevin Fulcher	MA - Head MA – Deputy Head IS – Programme & Finance Manager IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager IO – Communication Manager	Kick off
20.3.2025	Evasen Naidoo	IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager	*
2.4.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová	MA - Head MA – Deputy Head	
2.4.2025	Szabolcs Csahók Stanislava Tomanová	IS – Programme & Finance Manager MA	
16.4.2025	Henrik Jensen	HI Viborg	*
23.4.2025	Polona Frumen	Head of IO – Viborg	*
25.4.2025	Satu Hietanen Ilze Ciganska	Head of IO Turku Deputy Head of IO Turku	*
28.4.2025	Kevin Fulcher Severina Bloemberg	Communication Manager Communication team	*
29.4.2025	Ivana Lazic’	Head of IO Vienna	*
30.4.2025	Tomasz Petrikowski	Head of IS Valencia	*
12.5.2025	Kathrin Harrauer	HI Vienna	*
14.5.2025	Anabel Pascal Inmaculada Medina	HI Valencia	*
16.5.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová	MA - Head MA - Deputy Head	
19.5.2025	Alžbeta Osvaldová	HI Bratislava	*
19.5.2025	Petra Masácová Evasen Naidoo	MA - Head IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager	*

	Kevin Fulcher Severina Bloemberg	IO – Communication Manager Communication team	
27.5.2025	Kevin Fulcher	IO – Communication Manager	*
28.5.2025	Erika Klabníková Anton Kasagranda Zuzana Vargová Anna Vidová Martin Matala	Ministry of Finance of the SR	*
2.6.2025	Mikis Moselt	IS, IT tools manager	*
4.6.2025	Evasen Naidoo	IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager	
10.6.2025	Imre Czalagovits Tanja Rener	MC Member MC Member	MC Budapest
19.6.2025	Estelle Roger	EC	*
24.6.2025	Sina Redlich Pavel Lukeš	MC Member MC Member	*
11.7.2025	Jean Pierre Halkin Maria Sioliou Simona Pohlová	EC EC EC	*
29.7.2025	Moray Gilland	EC	*
31.7.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová	MA - Head MA – Deputy Head	
8.9.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová Ivana Lazic Satu Hietanen Tomasz Petrykowski Evasen Naidoo	MA – Head MA - Deputy Head Head of IO Vienna Head of IO Turku Head of IO Valencia IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager	*Focus group
2.10.2025	Petra Masácová Dagmar Kyseľová	MA – Head MA - Deputy Head	
29.10.2025	Petra Masácová Ivana Lazic Satu Hietanen Tomasz Petrykowski Evasen Naidoo	MA – Head Head of IO Vienna Head of IO Turku Head of IO Valencia IO – Quality & Evaluation Manager	*

*online

Annex 9 Literature and other sources

Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.

Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments

Commission Staff Working Document (2021): Performance, monitoring, and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, Brussels.

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Interact (2018) Reflection on progress towards medium-term strategies, 6th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting, 15-16 May 2018, Tallinn, Estonia

Interact (202) Impact Evaluation of the Interact Programme 2014-2020, Terms of Reference

Interact (2022) Interact IV Programme 2021-2027

Interact (2022) Methodology for establishing the Interact IV performance framework

Interact (2024) Final Implementation Report, Interact III

Interact IV (2024) Strategic Implementation Document

Interact IV Evaluation Plan, 2023

MacMaster, I., Wergles, N., Vironen, H. (2021). Operational Evaluation of the Interact Programme. Final Report.

McMaster, I., Wergles, N. and Vironen, H., EPRC, (2022) Interact 2014-2020 Impact Evaluation

McMaster, I., Wergles, N., Vironen, H. (2019). Case-based Impact Evaluation of the Interact Programme 2014-2020. Final Report.

Ministry of Finance SR (2022), Management and Implementation System of INTERACT IV Programme for the programming period 2021-2027

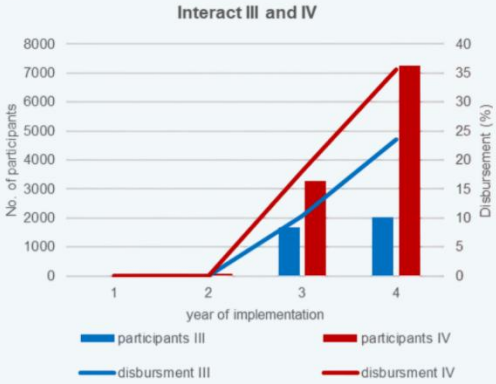
Annex 10 Infografics Task 1 - 3

Achievement of programme objectives

Evaluation survey results confirm **strong overall relevance**. Ratings vary by respondent background.

Notable progress

Overall momentum of implementation is stronger than the previous cycle and long-term goals remain achievable.



Availability of services

Only small proportion of respondents indicating missing services

Evaluation survey 2025

15%

"Thanks to Interact's extensive, tailor-made support, managing authorities have shifted from a strictly administrative approach to a more results-oriented and flexible one. This has allowed adaptation to changing environments, fostering bottom-up processes and gradually reshaping mindsets toward modern and dynamic ways of working."

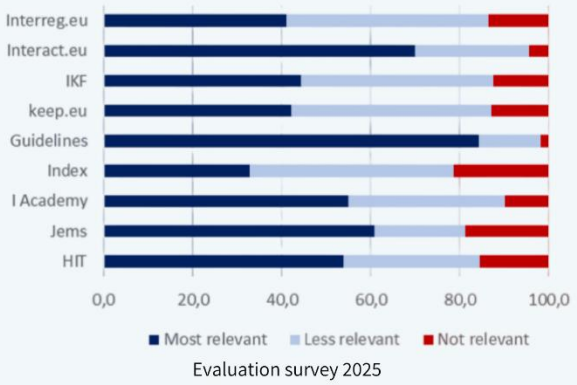
Indicators

Joint-action participation (events/networks) exceeded targets. **158%**

Two output indicators (joint training schemes) missed 2024 milestones.

Relevance of services

Services are generally considered relevant. Preferences vary by professional role.

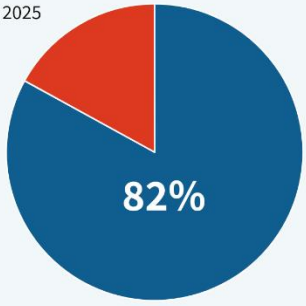


Evaluation survey 2025

Usefulness of the methods applied

Respondents proved high satisfaction with delivery approaches.

Evaluation survey 2025



2

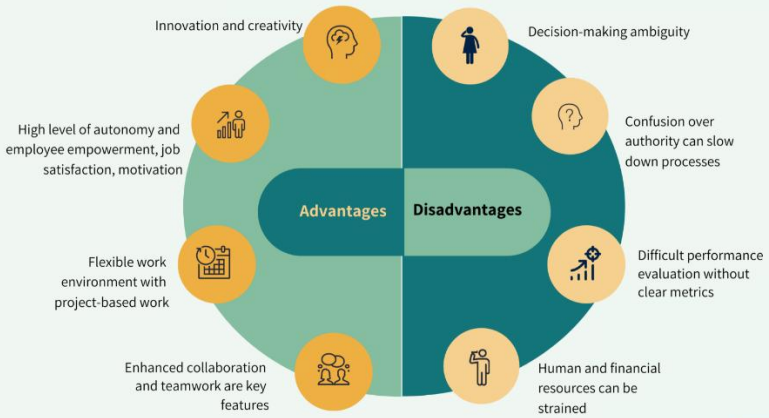
Programme Management

Decision making

Hybrid management structure

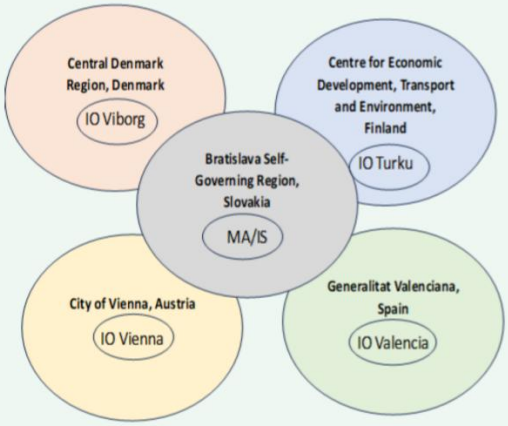
Interact blends a TA programme model with organisational features. This hybrid setup drives flexibility and innovation. It complicates HR, governance and long-term planning.

Adhocracy



Interact's flexible service model balances regional expertise with cross-office collaboration

Interact Offices



Active involvement

50% Half of the Programmes participate in service development
Evaluation survey 2025

3

Communication strategy and achievement of its objectives

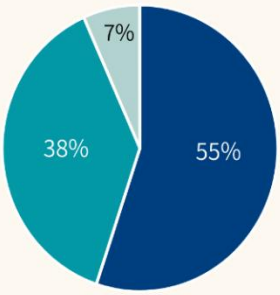
Alignment of objectives

The implementation shows clear alignment between communication objectives and the Programme's strategic goals.

Communication strategy

Communication Strategy is a **key driver of Interact's objectives**, boosts knowledge sharing, management, and cross-border cooperation.

Preferences of tools

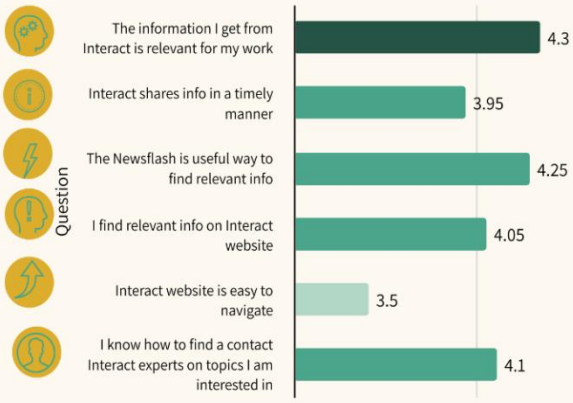


Evaluation survey 2025

Newslash Web Social media

Communication preferences differ by role; Newsflash is preferred widely, while social media usage remains limited across most groups.

Use and satisfaction



Interact survey 2023-24

Underrepresented programmes require focused attention