

# Enhancing project quality and strengthening assessment and selection practices

**EU Neighbours in action: Knowledge across borders | 19-20 May 2026**

## Overview

The session focused on enhancing project quality and strengthening assessment and selection practices within Interreg and external cooperation programmes. It provided a platform for programme representatives to exchange experiences and reflect on common challenges related to project assessment, partnership quality, cross-border added value, and selection procedures.

The discussion aimed to identify practical approaches for improving consistency, transparency, and the overall quality of project selection processes, while encouraging peer learning and the sharing of good practices across programmes.

## Methodology

The session combined a plenary introduction, an interactive networking exercise, and a facilitated discussion with presentations. It started with an overview of the workshop objectives, focusing on project quality, assessment procedures, and the role of programmes within EU Cohesion Policy. Participants were encouraged to take notes and actively contribute throughout the session.

This was followed by an “Interact Bingo” rapid networking activity, where participants moved around the room to identify colleagues matching predefined statements on bingo cards, engaging in short peer interviews. The session concluded with participant contributions and presentations from Interreg IPA and IPA–IPA programmes, comparing different assessment approaches and practices.

## Key discussion points

### Pre-application support

Participants highlighted the importance of pre-application support to improve project quality, including outreach to newcomers (e.g. partner search forums and online activities). Training for selection committee members was also seen as essential to ensure consistent application of criteria and reduce subjectivity.

### Concept note approach

The concept note stage was seen as a tool to focus resources on higher-quality ideas, although it does not fully guarantee application quality. Some programmes reported increased administrative burden due to a high volume of low-quality submissions.

### Other challenges

Issues included verifying legal status of partners, which could be addressed through external experts or national authorities. To address concerns about consultant- or AI-generated applications, a

“hearing” or pitching session with lead partners was proposed. For assessing cross-border cooperation, participants suggested requiring clearer justification of added value and using more open-ended assessment criteria rather than yes/no questions.

## **Main takeaways**

The discussion highlighted the importance of strengthening project quality already at the pre-application stage through targeted support, networking opportunities, and clearer guidance for applicants. Participants also stressed the value of briefing the assessors (both external and internal) in order to ensure more consistent, harmonized and transparent assessments.

There were mixed reflections on the concept note approach. While it can help programmes focus on the most promising ideas, some experiences showed that simplified procedures may also generate a high number of weaker applications and increase administrative workload.

Participants further reflected on practical challenges in the assessment process, including partner verification and the growing use of consultants and AI in application preparation. Greater interaction with applicants during the selection phase by introducing additional step of their knowledge verification was seen as one possible way to ensure stronger ownership and understanding of project proposals.

A common theme throughout the session was the need for assessment methods that better capture the added value of cross-border cooperation by encouraging applicants to clearly demonstrate the benefits of joint territorial action.

## **Follow-up actions / next steps**

The next step is to strengthen knowledge transfer between Interreg IPA and IPA–IPA programmes by comparing and exchanging assessment approaches and selection methodologies. A brief mapping of existing systems could be prepared to identify good practices. Further peer-learning sessions could focus on harmonisation of assessment grids and guidelines and assessors training methods. In the longer term, an informal community of practice could support continuous exchange and gradual alignment of assessment procedures.

## **Session team**

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