

Developing impact pathways to demonstrate the added value of Interreg

Interact |

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Interact



**Co-funded by
the European Union**
Interreg

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introduction**

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status quo**

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Impact
pathways of
Interreg
Flanders-
Netherland**

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closure**

Objectives



- Review progress of the pilot exercise regarding the "Harmonised approach to capture and highlight the added value of Interreg"
- Explain the methodology for developing impact pathways including formulating evaluation questions and design.
- Review and discuss the experience of Interreg Flanders–Netherlands in developing impact pathways, including lessons learned and practical challenges.
- Identify next steps and discuss how programmes can utilise these results and methodologies in their own evaluation activities

Why impact pathways?



- Interreg creates value through cooperation - but this value is often indirect, long-term and context-dependent.
- Impact pathways help us explain how cooperation is expected to lead to change.
- They make assumptions visible and show where evidence is needed.
- They support clearer evaluations and more convincing messages on the added value of Interreg.

Update on impact pathways: status quo



Status quo: where are we now

Enhance the shared understanding of Interreg's added value by developing a robust methodology to effectively demonstrate its impact.

Analysis

Review the 2014-2020 impact evaluations of Interreg programmes to analyse how added value was defined.

Common definition

Started to build a common framework by developing a common definition of added value in Interreg

Key elements

Identified key elements contributing to Interreg's added value.

Tentative approach

Developed together possible impact pathways (summary)

Tentative approach

Test, refine and make the approach practical for programmes and focus on defining evaluation questions

2027

Come up with common messages ???

Common working definition of added value of Interreg

Added value refers to the unique benefits and impact that cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation brings, which could not be achieved without the Interreg programme's support.

This added value is characterized by for example the formation and strengthening of sustainable cross-border/transnational/interregional partnerships, the testing, developing and/or rolling out of shared solutions to common challenges, and the promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation across borders, building capacity for sustainable development, addressing shared challenges jointly, and generating long-lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

Interreg programmes go beyond the scope of individual, local, regional, national or interregional actions and create synergies that generate lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

By enabling people and professionals to collaborate across borders, Interreg programmes reduce barriers and disparities, broaden perspectives, and strengthen regional cohesion, ultimately benefiting communities.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 1/3

Specificity and additional benefit of the programme

- **Unique achievements and outcomes:** The only way how Interreg projects, outputs, and accomplishments are possible is jointly through cooperation and collaboration. Interreg delivers unique results by enabling cross-border cooperation to deliver results that cannot be achieved through other mechanisms.
- **Lowering mental barriers:** Interreg reduces the negative impact of borders in terms of the spread of ideas and the use of services. It broadens the mental scope of people involved in the implementation of the projects and their target groups. In border areas this results in people having more actual possibilities (as consumer, job-seeker etc.)
- **Identity:** Interreg contributes significantly to the development of regional identities by promoting cross-border/transnational cooperation and supporting joint projects that foster the exchange of cultures, ideas and values, strengthen awareness of shared regional characteristics, and reinforce cohesion as part of a common European future.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 2/3

2. Strengthening partnerships

- **Enhancing partnership maturity:** Interreg fosters the development of long-term, cross-border/transnational/interregional partnerships that go beyond individual projects, creating lasting collaborations that would not have formed without Interreg support.
- **Improving cooperation quality:** Interreg programmes raise the quality and effectiveness of cross-border/transnational/interregional cooperation by establishing structures and practices for productive partnerships.
- **Strengthening long-term cooperation and governance:** By building institutional and governance capacities, Interreg programmes create a sustainable foundation for ongoing collaboration between regions, promoting forward-looking cross-border governance and strengthening cohesion across Europe.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 3/3

3. Tangible impacts of cooperation

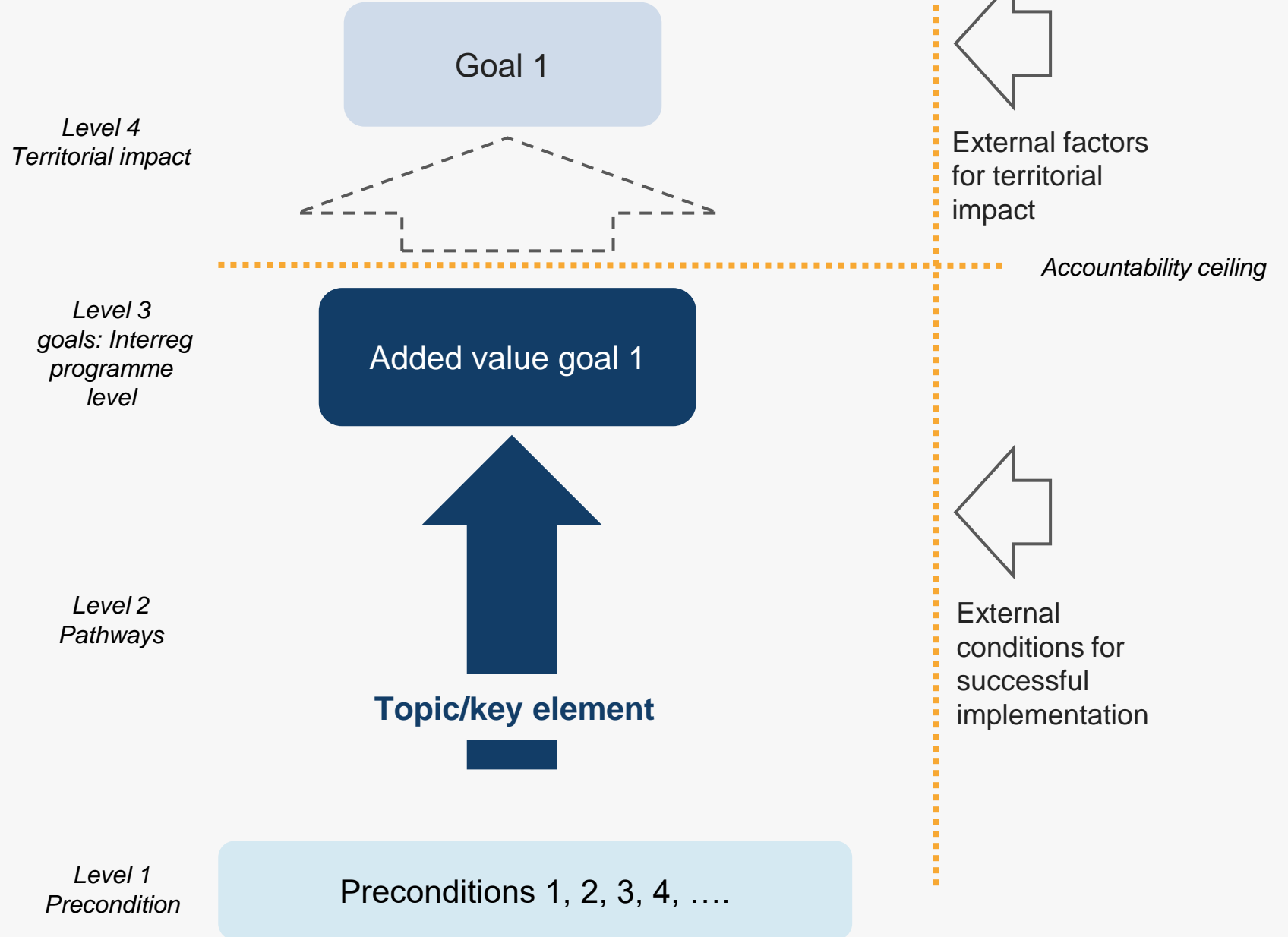
- **Direct benefits for citizens/institutions:** Interreg brings concrete benefits to citizens and institutions on both sides of borders, from building mutual trust to improving the quality of life across borders.
- **Addressing crossborder/transnational/interregional challenges:** It enables solutions to common cross-border and transnational (CBC/TN) challenges that can be effectively tackled only in cooperation between countries facilitating collective approaches to shared issues.
- **Building capacity and innovation:** Interreg strengthens local and regional capacity by providing access to new skills, knowledge, and tools, while fostering innovation and knowledge exchange across borders.
- **Economic and regional synergies:** Interreg programmes drive economic growth, regional synergies, and sustainable development through joint efforts, resulting in broader regional benefits and enhanced competitiveness

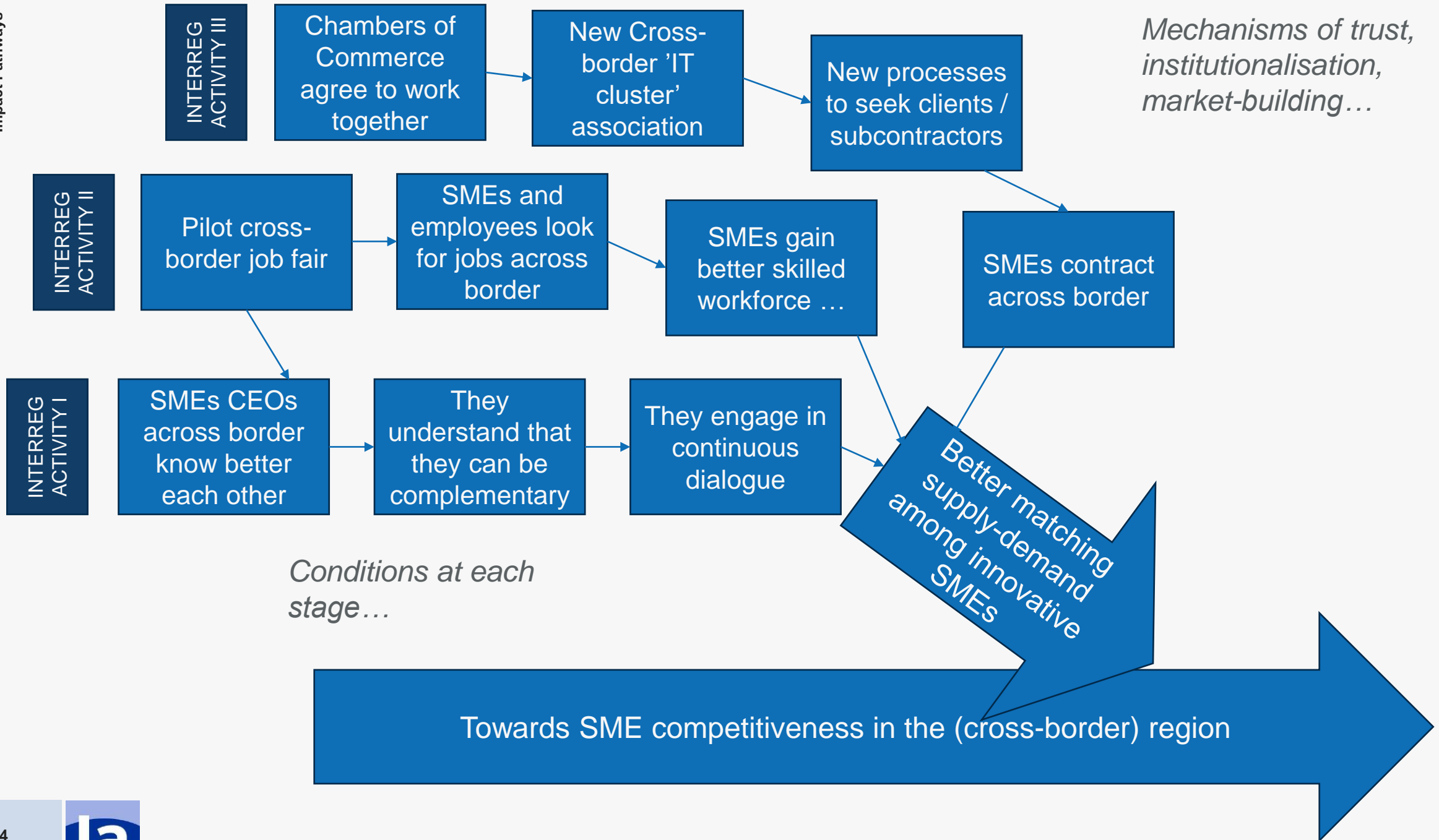
Clarifying key concepts

Concept	Simple image	Main purpose
Intervention logic	The skeleton	Formulates the programme's expected activities and results <u>at design stage</u>
Theory of Change	The map	Explains how and why change is happening (happened), and how the programme contributes (did contribute)
Impact pathways	The routes	Describe the specific, testable causal chains through which the programme makes an impact

Visual logic of an impact pathway

A pathway of change that shows the connections between early, intermediate and long term outcomes





Specific features of impact pathways

- Pathways can run **in parallel, be complementary or alternatives**
 - Different pathways working together may lead to new impacts
- Chains can be **short or long** – they are not limited to outputs, results or impacts
- They need to be **detailed enough** to be testable
- In new or experimental settings, they are likely to **emerge from the evaluation process** — and therefore need to be updated or refined

Unpacking the "Mystery Box" — or why things sometimes work, and sometimes don't

Stakeholders

Their priorities and actions drive the intervention

Mechanisms

The underlying cooperation-related effects (like trust or shared identity) triggered by Interreg

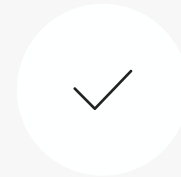
Contexts

E.g. "Cooperation Maturity" - is the programme working in an early, intermediate, or advanced cooperation environment?

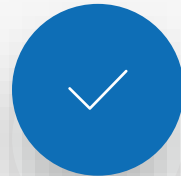
How impact pathways sharpen your evaluation?



Trace causal links: Move beyond counting outputs to explaining the "how" and "why"



Target Data Collection: Focus efforts on key stages of the pathway rather than trying to measure everything



Identify "Tipping Points": Pinpoint the critical steps where a project is likely to succeed or fail

Identifying "Hotspots" for learning

What is a Hotspot?

A point where the logic feels weak or implementation frequently stalls

Evaluation Focus:

These hotspots are exactly where your evaluation questions should be targeted



Turning impact pathways into smart evaluation questions

Once we've mapped how change is expected to happen,
→ We ask: **What do we need to learn or test?**

Evaluation questions help:

- Focus the analysis
- Guide data collection
- Assess the role and value of cooperation
- Good questions are linked to key steps or assumptions in the impact pathway

Key considerations when formulating questions

- **Purpose:** Why do we need this question? Who will use the answer?
- **Relevance:** Is it aligned with the programme's goals and impact pathway?
- **Feasibility:** Can we collect the data needed to answer it?
- **Scope:** Is it focused, not too general or abstract?
- **Stakeholder interest:** Does the question matter to programme actors?

Start with **many questions**, then **prioritise** based on usefulness and feasibility.

Where to place evaluation questions?

- Key points to target with questions:
 - Points of change: Where outcomes shift significantly
 - Points of assumption: Where we expect something to happen without direct control
 - Points of risk or uncertainty: where implementation often slows/break down/gets delayed/runs into obstacles.
 - Steps that are essential for success (tipping points)
- Look for:
 - Gaps in logic
 - External conditions that matter

How to formulate strong evaluation questions

- Use clear and focused wording.
- Link each question to a specific part of the pathway.
- Make sure the question can be answered with available or realistic evidence.
- Use open formulations: To what extent...? How did...? What contributed to...? Why did / why didn't...?
- Example: To what extent did Interreg cooperation strengthen joint policy planning in the programme area?

6 steps to working with impact pathways

1. Map the Landscape

Identify various potential pathways relevant to your thematic goal.

2. Zoom in

Select 1–2 key pathways that are most meaningful and have data potential.

3. Define key questions

Develop learning questions tailored to the chosen pathway.

4. Refine pathways

Adjust logic based on empirical feedback

5. Test the logic

Apply the pathway to real projects to see if the causal links hold true.

6. Make evaluative judgments

Use the results to assess the contribution of Interreg to the observed change.



Peer review: Impact pathways of Interreg Flanders-Netherlands

Jip Wolterinck, Interreg Flanders-Netherlands



Intervention Logic (IL) - upcoming events

Mid/end of June	Survey and HIT Factsheet Intervention Logic (IL), Sharepoint
17 September, online	Let's discuss HIT Intervention Logic (IL)
27-28 October, Budapest	Let's agree HIT Intervention Logic (IL) + Application Form (AF)
10 November, online	Let's agree HIT Intervention Logic (IL)
20-21 January, (tbd)	Finalise HIT Intervention Logic (IL) + Application Form (AF)

Upcoming events and trainings related to evaluation

tbc

5.11-3.12.2026

Discuss indicator fiches for the period 2028-2034

Certified training:
Evaluation practitioners, (final meeting), **Germany**

Other upcoming P-BA events

27 May, Talinn

InterFIN 2026

01 June, online

P-BA in Interreg: the basics #4

11 June, online
(TBA)

Presentation of first P-BA models

Thank you for being here!

Your opinion matters to us.

Please take a few minutes to provide us with feedback to help us improve our services.

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