

Interact IV 2021-2027 Interreg programme

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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

Text field [2 000]

Not applicable for Interact.

1.2. Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

Text field [50 000]

According to point (c) of Article 3(3) of 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 ('Interreg Regulation'), the objective of interregional cooperation is to reinforce the effectiveness of the cohesion policy. As such, Interreg programmes are the main target group of the Interact IV Programme. Other cooperation stakeholders such as macro-regional strategy actors, actors in the context of Article 22(3), point (d)(vi) of 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 (Common Provisions Regulation, 'CPR'), and other policy actors implementation cooperation will also receive Interact support. Instead of a territorial analysis approach, this section shall focus on the needs of these target groups (Interact "customers").

Interreg SWOT analysis

It is first relevant to understand Interreg as policy tool, its 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses' and to consider the 'Opportunities' and 'Threats' (SWOT) in the context of 2021-2027 period. The below analysis was conducted with the support of Interact's core stakeholders, including Member States through the Programming Task Force, Programming Committee (PC) and with Interreg programmes, as part of the Interact IV programming process. Through this analysis, Interact is able build proposed areas of intervention to support programmes as they seek to tackle joint challenges, respond to joint investment needs and find complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments. The SWOT analysis revealed areas where target groups may need specific help and support in order for Interreg to become an even more effective tool, and to be recognised as such, within cohesion policy and beyond.

As ex-ante evaluations are no longer required, Interact sought additional insight to cross reference the SWOT analysis with other European Union (EU)-level documents. These documents included but were not limited to: the 7th Cohesion Report; Ex-post evaluations of programming period 2007-2013; Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions; and Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions – Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth. While there are many possible additional ideas from these documents, the below is a summary which defines the approach of the Interact IV Programme.

The full SWOT analysis can be found in Strategic Orientation Paper for Interact IV, which is available on request.

Strengths

The added value of Interreg, especially in the European integration context, is recognised in the main documents reviewed. Furthermore, when fundamental questions are asked about 'the

European project', cooperation and European territorial cooperation (ETC) in particular are core parts of the answer; how cooperation brings neighbours, as well as people and EU institutions closer together. Supported by 30 years of experience, Interreg programmes are established as stable structures to manage multi-annual funding for cooperation actions within a territory. There is a reason why macro-regional strategies (MRS), sea-basin strategies (SBS) and initiatives, as well as other territorial strategies seek Interreg support, not only in terms of funding but in experience as well. At the same time, a link to such a strategy can give Interreg programmes additional strategic recognition within given policy or territory.

These territorial focuses also encourage Interreg to avoid sectoral silos and provide a place where different competences (and interests) can meet to solve common challenges in innovative ways. This is why Interreg programmes and projects are seen as innovation and learning incubators, where stakeholders from multiple layers and regions can participate in the co-creation process in order to improve public governance and service to citizens. Interreg benefits from a motivating work environment, where structures to promote EU policies to citizens exist and have widespread support, such as European Cooperation Day, and the Regio Stars Awards.

Another important strength of Interreg is the active community, the human capital. It has driven the development of these programmes during these 30 years. Interreg can be proud of the way those implementing cooperation show enormous capacity to learn from each other, to adapt their work and approaches within a constantly changing environment. The ability to find innovative solutions amid a complex structure with multiple legal frameworks, including with local interpretations of the same European level rules, is especially noteworthy.

Weaknesses

The complexity (of interests, stakeholders, ideas, structures, rules, etc.) in Interreg has a high impact on the strategic level. The fact that the programmes bring together such diversity creates an ownership challenge in terms of strategic steering and the implementation of the programmes and the projects. On one extreme, it can lead to conflicts due to differing visions or understanding, and on the other, a *laissez-faire* attitude where 'nobody' really feels responsible for taking on the leadership role. There are still examples where projects seem to define the programme, and not the other way around. While all programmes find their way to manage this complexity, in the long term all these 'challenges' may be too difficult to understand for EU policy stakeholders. While cooperation, and Interreg specifically, is seen as a serious policy tool, without the shared vision for cooperation, the importance of this work in contrast to other funding mechanisms means it may not get proportionate prioritisation, particularly when it comes to funding.

The number of programmes, each funding a number of projects does not make it easy to tell the story of cooperation at accumulated policy level. Each project is an individual success telling its own local story, but these do not naturally find each other in order to tell the more comprehensive story at an EU level. This EU level storytelling is vital in order to satisfy the political logic of policy accountability at EU level. The disconnect between territorial successes of Interreg and sector specific policy logic may create an unbridgeable gap.

The lack of a clear strategic vision for cooperation at the EU level poses further challenges to Interreg, in order to develop a strategically recognised policy monitoring system (indicators) that would enable the story of cooperation to reach EU level policy makers in a right way. To date, attempts are bottom up, educated guesses as to political requirements. The fact that Interreg results are normally long-term, and that better cooperation may sometimes be a result in itself, does not always fit into the wider political and policy narrative. In effect, instead of appreciating the cooperation for what it is, other objectives are added, leading to goal congestion and a confusion of focus. The absence of a structured learning cycle from evaluation process (operational and impact) as a standard practice in all programmes does not help programmes respond to this challenge either.

The Commission publication ‘Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions’ (2017) raised the importance of cooperation between all key stakeholders for a given obstacle to be removed, and consequently for the desired benefit to be realised. Interreg programmes have a relatively high entry costs for new beneficiaries, due to their complex structure, and have a tendency towards gold plating resulting from the prevailing ‘zero-risk’ culture. As such, other funding sources may be ‘an easier catch’ for newcomers, and therefore the presence of typical subjects and long-term project partners generally prevail in Interreg.

With resources often focused on the real, or perceived, complexity of administration, the strategic work on establishing and enhancing real connections within the territory and in tackling the identified joint challenges may be neglected. Connections between Interreg programmes are weak, and the connection between Interreg and the Investment for Jobs and Growth (IJG 2021-2027, or IGJ in 2014-2020) programmes are even weaker. As a result, Interreg may be re-financing the same ideas and on a higher level, and miss the opportunity to anchor programmes and project results in policy frameworks that make them more sustainable. This focus on administration-first makes it difficult to invest real resources in developing internal policy expertise in the relevant fields for the programme.

Last but not least, the cycle returns to resources and the structural challenge Interreg programmes experience in financing daily operations with cash on account. The ‘financial flows’ logic of structural funds apply to Interreg programmes without additional considerations. This makes the Technical Assistance (TA) resources, the sole funding for programme staff, vulnerable and not always in-sync with programme needs at the various

points in the programme life-cycle. Coupled with relative low use of simplified cost options (SCOs), it also requires beneficiaries to be able to long term pre-finance their own activities. This further raises challenges for new beneficiaries, and may even prohibit the participation of beneficiaries without the financial resources to wait for repayments.

Opportunities

The new programming period carries a substantial hope for simplification. The legislative package draft has been substantially reduced and should function as the integrated framework for all Cohesion Policy funds. There should be less secondary legislation in the form of guidance, which exploded in the 2014-2020 period and further complicated the understandings of the legal statuses. The initial idea of ‘no guidance’ has moved to ‘less guidance’, which avoids the risks of total void on clarification, where it is needed.

Some of the simplification proposals go further than what has been on the table so far, such as the single audit sample, risk based management verifications, and the amplification of SCOs. The accounting function can (but does not have to) be fully integrated into the Managing Authority, and programmes can work outside eligible area without the need to monitor specific limits. Taken together this should substantially reduce the focus (and resources) on the administrative side of programme management.

The increased pressure on resources may create a positive environment to take a new approach. With less resources, there is an opportunity to test a new models of coordinating interventions between programmes in overlapping territories, regardless of the programme strand (i.e. cross-border and transnational). This ‘opportunistic’ thinking, without a regulatory requirement to do it, could be used to re-think programme niches in such overlapping geographies for all programmes. This can be taken even further if innovative initiatives like repayable assistance are again put on the table, during the programming process.

These simplification and reinvention efforts could be an opportunity to make cooperation more attractive and more approachable for stakeholders beyond Interreg, such as new beneficiaries. In particular, the Commission’s ‘Strengthening Innovation in Europe’s regions – Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth’ publication promotes cooperation as a tool for dialogue, learning, inspiration and investment initiatives/projects. Interreg should profit from this spotlight attention as an ‘incubator of cooperation’ in Europe.

This should of course go beyond a pure marketing stunt and be link to a strategic agenda. Anchoring at least some Interreg activities into the challenge of permanently solving certain border obstacles identified in the above-mentioned publication could be a way of achieving this. This may call for much stronger political leadership and commitment of participating Member States and other stakeholders within the multi-level governance model, which would need to lead and sustain an active dialogue between institutions having the key role in

removing the given obstacle. At the same time, calls for a renewed Territorial Agenda 2030 emphasise the need to come back the place-based approach and highlight the role of the territorial cooperation and governance of functional areas. Both are the strengths of Interreg.

Last, but not least, the common result indicators should lead to the effective capturing of accumulated Interreg contribution to the Cohesion Policy, even if we do not feel that they fully represent Interreg core added value. This in turn could help communicate Interreg even more strategically and respond to the European Council call on making Cohesion Policy more visible.

Threats

The logic of the legislative proposal 2021-2027 was presented rather as an evolution than a revolution. Although it can be noted that this view is not held by all stakeholders. However one perceives these individual changes, the accumulated change with some of the new, more revolutionary, proposals may still be draining resources towards administration of these changes. In this way, the opportunity to focus resources on content may not be realised. As with most of the interests and interactions in cooperation, the accumulated change process will require resources to be actively managed. In effect, the perceived and/or real complexity of Interreg will remain and the new potential Interreg beneficiaries may still find it easier to go to the 'simpler' funding sources. In an extreme case, even the usual suspects in the Interreg context, may choose to change to another fund, as indicated in a number of studies, including the European Parliament (EP) research paper 'Gold plating in the European Investment funds'.

Clearly, some of the proposals are revolutionary enough that the success can go both ways. The single audit sample may be a huge simplification and reduction of administrative burden, if programmes can be brought on board. Programmes may also face some (political) objections to trust the new system. These changes may also create unexpected consequences for the overall management and control system of individual programmes. Certainly, the risk of negative unpredicted consequences exists and will need management. Similarly, the reduced co-financing rate coupled with flat rate on TA reimbursements may lead to lack of resources in some stages of programme life-cycle.

The suggestion to introduce component 5 in Interreg was quite a surprise, but it can be seen as a recognition of cooperation being able to solve some of the strategic challenges of Europe. Following negotiations, this was removed from the Interreg structure, but there is potential that the idea will have a longer-term impact. If it is successful, due to its political appeal, it may further detract resources from Interreg in subsequent funding periods. If it is not, the failure may (justifiably or not) be 'blamed' on cooperation and Interreg may be thrown into the same 'unsuccessful bag'. In the same manner, the scale of expectations towards Interreg

support to MRS, if not realistic, may lead to disappointment on delivery from the strategic stakeholders.

This mismatch of expectations and Interreg capacity may be a symptom of a bigger general issue of a lack of common understanding and acceptance of what to measure in cooperation programmes. We may continue a conflict between the political need for an immediate and tangible result and the Interreg reality, where results have a more long-term impact and are less tangible in nature. The scale of this conflict is always tested between programming periods, and particularly in setting resources in the Multi Annual Financial Framework. The challenge of the reduction in the Interreg 2021-2027 budget amplifies the challenge of seeking to create larger, politically attractive results through diminished resources.

Cooperation actors in the context of draft Article 22 CPR

In addition to Interact IV's core target audience, the programme is tasked to work on harmonising and simplifying possible cooperation actions, that is to say "interregional, cross-border and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or outside the Union, where relevant" and financed by IJG programmes (Article 22(3), point (d)(vi) CPR).

In preparations for the new programming period, in 2019 Interact informally approached a number of actors responsible for drafting the new IJG programmes in order to understand their ideas on the implementation of the requirements of Article 22(3), point (d)(vi) of the CPR (earlier reference in the draft CPR: Article 17(3), point (d)(v)). This was done to respond to a request from the Interact III Programme Monitoring Committee to explore interest and envisaged support to establish cooperation with IJG programmes. Through these discussions, Interact observed that interest and preparedness to make use of this article varies between programmes and Member States. While the approach in 2019 was perhaps too early for programmes to offer considered feedback, key observations from that meeting included:

- Several responses that pointed to 'business-as-usual' scenario – i.e. no plans to accommodate the provisions in national/regional programmes.
- Programmes highlighting that the application of the Article 22(3), point (d)(vi) CPR should be based on real needs and not to merely satisfy the regulations to avoid the 'tick-box' effect. They also pointed to difficulties in defining ex-ante transnational actions, and concerns based on the experience of implementing transnational actions across Member States.
- Some programmes that had already started programming, with no specific thought or awareness of what the article means in practice. They were open to learn more, including about possible Interact support.

- For some, the perception associated with high administrative obstacles for implementing measures with beneficiaries from other Member States needs to be tackled. Support from Interact to harmonise and simplify the application of the article would be welcome.
- Issues of eligibility of transnational actions, the differences in administrative and control systems, as well as the application procedures. These issues were a concern for some Member States even when thematic cooperation made sense.
- Specific opportunity provided by the article in the context of embedding MRS into mainstream programmes as best as possible.
- Specific idea on organising a national exchange on the article as a pilot for interested Member States.

Based on the gathered feedback and considering Interact experience and observation, one can conclude that there is a clear need for awareness raising and capacity building in this area. Until it becomes a habit and a tradition – cooperation requires constant and continuous support effort. Specifically, forcing cooperation on those not convinced of the benefits it brings, or perceiving it as an administrative and institutional burden, will not lead to good cooperation, and good results.

Interact SWOT

The above review paints a picture of the reality of Interact's customers and their potential needs. In order to understand the capacity of Interact IV to address the challenges, and best tailor our service portfolio, a similar SWOT analysis was conducted. It was based on the joint work of the Programming Task Force, Interact team and the evaluations available at the time.

The full SWOT analysis can be found in Strategic Orientation Paper for Interact IV, which is available on request.

Strengths

Since the start of Interact, in the 2000-2006 period, it has supported changes of practice in programme authorities and cultures ('mindsets'), which contribute to the achievement of wider impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of programme implementation. This was a key finding of the Case-based Impact Evaluation (2019) conducted by the Centre for European Policy Studies, University of Strathclyde. In the 2014-2020 period, Interact's role was further solidified by linking the contribution of the programme to thematic objective 11 "Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and efficient public administration".

A reflection on Interact's history shows that the programme has been constantly evolving to address the needs of the target groups. In this process, Interact's team has taken on many new and challenging tasks and this has led to numerous debates and discussions. Interact continues to take on an expanding role in finding, defining and voicing the opinion of the Interreg

community, and ensuring that the Interreg specificities are recognised and given appropriate attention during policy making and implementation.

A core success of the programme is engaging Interreg actors in networks of expertise. Over the years Interact has looked at Interreg from a 360-degree perspective, all practices and requirements related to programming and implementation have been scrutinised, relevant target groups identified and engaged in specialist networks. These practices are far-reaching and are not restricted to management aspects alone. Increasingly, Interact has built capacity in working with programmes on thematic issues, MRS actors, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) practitioners, etc. Results from the Case-based Impact Evaluation highlight that Interact has "clearly enhanced the culture of inter-programme cooperation", and "has shaken the habits of programme authorities". In view of the provisions made in the Interreg regulation related to the new tasks for the programme, an important strength is that Interact staff have knowledge of and experience with tailoring services to the needs of strategic framework actors as well as other cooperation programmes and mechanisms. Even if the results are often soft or intangible in nature, the exchanges between these actors were evaluated as "invaluable" for promoting strategic structures and processes. They have also supported work to establish a foundation for better governance of the strategies.

A key immediate result of Interact's work can be linked to enhancing the administrative and institutional capacity of the Interreg actors to implement and manage their programmes. As the evaluation has concluded, in all five cases evaluated there is evidence of changes to structures and processes in Interreg, changes to staff skills and organisational culture as well as changes to systems and tools. There is also evidence that these have triggered changes at the project level as well. For example, Interact's tools have contributed to reducing the administrative burden for applicants and have led to other operational improvements, such as better calls for proposals by programmes, and supporting the applicant capacity to develop projects suitable for Interreg.

Interact has something to offer to everyone, regardless of their prior experience in Interreg. A quick review of the target groups covered by Interact services reveals that the programme relies on the broad engagement of a wide range of actors within and outside Interreg. This is also due to the broad expertise developed within the team on issues such as capitalisation, coordination and cooperation, programme management, SCOs, MRS and SBS implementation support, EGTC and many others. Developing tools and services for the implementation of the programmes and the policy in the 2021-2027 period will require even closer collaboration with these actors to ensure deeper matches between services and needs.

Feedback from stakeholders indicates that Interact is a respected and trusted partner in discussions. Independent, unbiased views and neutrality of discussions are signature characteristics from Interact in such discussions. These statements are supported by the

expanding scope of the target groups for Interact beyond Interreg. For example, actors of newer MRS have been engaged in existing networks and the network of audit authorities has developed into an active community. Interact has also reached the European citizen. Analysis of the 2020 edition of the European Cooperation Day campaign showed that it reached over two million people, particularly through increased social media activities. The potential use of and further developing of joined branding, strengthening capitalisation and better utilising dissemination channels can further boost these successes.

Some of the primary benefits of Interact can be linked to effectiveness, efficiency and free availability of resources, which support the resilience of programmes. Interact holds a small fraction of the Interreg budget and the conclusions from the Case-based Impact Evaluation show that this money is well-spent. It is a great success that Interact has supported programmes to save money and human resources. Interact's electronic Monitoring System (eMS) alone has led to a saving of up to EUR 20 million compared to a non-cooperative approach. Other initiatives such as keep.eu, the joint branding and Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT) have also led to time and resources saving for individual programmes in a range of areas where implemented.

Interact's tools and services provide a "common basic standard for programme management". Improved efficiency is paired with improvements in quality of programme management, such as increase in legal certainty for programme authorities. Such certainty stems from the wide consultation during service delivery and product development stages, as well as the wide use and application of these solutions among the community and beyond. Facilitating uniformity of interpretations is another distinct benefit of Interact's services delivery. Interact services were also often seen by the ENI CBC programmes as an example for consideration, in spite of their alternative regulatory framework.

A key strength of Interact is that it has contributed to building an Interreg community and making this community visible and known among key policy makers and institutions (outside Regional Policy as well). Interact has actively supported the identification and promotion of Interreg achievements, and the awareness of Interreg amongst wider EU policymaking stakeholders has also increased. The European Commission, the EP and Member States alike have increasingly acknowledged these results. This helps position Interreg in the policy tapestry.

The identity of a system or an organisation is rooted in its history. Interact has provided a valuable historical evidence and memory in keep.eu. The richness of Interreg can never be questioned as it has been preserved, spanning across several programming periods, to provide a solid and reliable knowledge base.

The strengths of Interact are rooted in the expertise, the professionalism, and personal drive of the Interact staff. They are also reliant on the strong culture of the programme to innovate and be pro-active towards the target groups. Over the years, Interact's structure has supported flexibility of service and strong customer orientation.

Weaknesses

One of the key strengths and perceptions of Interact, of being a trusted, neutral facilitator, is also linked to one of the weaknesses, i.e. efficiency gains for the Interreg community could be even more pronounced should Interact have stronger facilitation role, especially to enhance final decisions during discussions as part of delivery of larger service packages. The wide participatory approach, in some cases, could be paired with a stronger decision-making role to save time. The Case-based Impact Evaluation showed that this is particularly relevant for the development of big projects such as HIT, eMS and the joint Interreg brand. It has been acknowledged that extensive consultation can lead to, as one participant in the Case-based Impact Evaluation put it, a "complication" of the final product due to Interact striving to take every opinion on-board. Furthermore, Interact could benefit from more direct links to key legislators and decision-makers, and in particular from participation in their specialised expert networks. This would enable the establishment of a smoother flow of information and experience, as well as more targeted and efficient communication both upwards (towards e.g. the Commission) and downwards (i.e. towards the programmes).

The above shortcomings may be also linked to another challenge, associated mainly with the uptake of Interact services and implementation of the service as set by Interact. Products developed by Interact have been used to a varying degree by various stakeholders. It is also common (e.g. in the case of HIT, eMS, Interreg branding) that changes to final products were made by programmes who had not participated in the process of developing the tools, and decision making at key stages. The danger in these cases is that certain logic and rationale may be distorted, and, in the worst case, the main gain can be lost, such as the benefit of harmonisation of specific programme practices. Again, this has an effect on the simplification efforts made on behalf of the whole community and could have negative resonance with the applicants and beneficiaries.

Interact has built a powerful reputation among the Interreg programme management bodies. Since Interact's inception, a strong sense of community and belonging has been built amongst the Interreg community, and Interact is part of this community. Nevertheless, the role of Interact in leading some of the strategic projects for the Interreg community is not well-known or acknowledged in policy-making circles and institutions. Interact can increase its presence among these actors and work harder to engage national authorities and Member States in promoting the services and achievements. This will be particularly relevant in view of the new tasks of engaging with IJG programmes as stated in the regulations.

The above implies that there is also an important task for Interact in addressing the above weakness. The strength of knowing the strategy and cooperation actors can be deepened within the Interact staff. There is also room for improving the internal exchange and knowledge of relevant actors outside the Interreg community. According to the evaluation, there is "great potential for Interact to do more"... "if proportionate resources are allocated". There is also a need for a "clear strategy" and "mandate" to help strengthen the service delivery.

The de-centralised structure of Interact is a strength as it has defined the flexible, customer-oriented culture of Interact. At the same time, some organisational challenges can be attributed to this setting.

Products and services are often developed by virtual teams, as those working on certain topics do not necessarily share the same office – a pre-existing situation further exacerbated during in the COVID-19 pandemic by home-office requirements. The rich multi-cultural background of Interact staff makes service delivery more robust, at the same time different cultural, working and institutional backgrounds of the staff can lead to prolonged discussions to reach understanding and consensus. This is present on both the service delivery and management levels of the programme.

The wide service portfolio covered by Interact implies that not everyone can be engaged in everything. Indeed, there has been some office specialisation and leadership in dealing with certain fields. While this was often done to promote efficiency of service – i.e. as coordination among members from one office can be easier to organise and decision-making can be faster – it also reflects procurement realities in some cases. However, this can also facilitate the creation of silos, both on personal and office level, as well as within project teams. The risk exists that knowledge is concentrated in a few members of staff or an individual, and knowledge sharing and learning from each other can be inefficient.

Such silos make the programme vulnerable to sudden departure of staff and to loss of key knowledge and expertise. There could be also lack of staff for development and delivery of specialised services required by the target groups. Time to fully on-board Interact colleagues can also be long, with around six months required, before a new staff member is fully operational in their position. Clearer focus and orientation of the programme in the new period will address some of these concerns. The Case-based Impact Evaluation also stated that projects, such as HIT, eMS, and support to MRS also need proportionate resource allocation, this point is also relevant for other significant projects not included in the evaluation such as capitalisation and online learning.

Opportunities

There is a distinct opportunity for Interact to play a key role in supporting simplification. Firstly, in promoting simplification during programming to ensure that simplification provisions are taken up by programmes, and secondly in implementation to ensure that the solutions are interpreted and followed in an appropriate manner. There is also an opportunity to develop tools for the implementation of the programmes based on the simplification principle. Such efforts will lead to distinct gains in effectiveness and efficiency. Simplification, paired with transparency, should also reduce the risks of gold plating.

There is the opportunity for Interact to continue its leadership role in engaging Interreg actors in expert networks, and to further expand and deepen the relationship with some target groups. For example, with the Interreg programmes, Interreg-IPA CBC programmes and Interreg NEXT programmes all sharing the same regulatory framework, Interact will have a stronger role to play in supporting the whole Interreg community, including IPA CBC, NEXT and outermost regions (OMR). It is anticipated that the engagement of Interact with IJG actors will be more pronounced in the new period, as set out in the Intervention logic matrix (Appendix 5) and in 2.1.4 below. This provides an opportunity for Interact to build new knowledge on the cultural and administrative context of these programmes and to foster closer links with national and programme authorities. There is an opportunity in strengthening the engagement with MRS and SBS in the future, which is also part of the strategic decision for the programme. Such expanded target group base implies that tools and services developed by Interact will have an effect beyond the Interreg community.

This will require a well-defined scope for engagement with different actors, coupled with a proper understanding of their needs, in order to provide bespoke and relevant services. This should also inspire an opportunity to be more focused on seeking to achieve the maximum benefit from Interact's interventions. Developing and delivering more integrated services, making greater use of online learning, and promoting digitalisation can lead to resource savings for the target groups. In some cases, this could mean bringing the programmes even closer since many have different limitations (e.g. staff, time, ability to travel, etc.) and thus are disadvantaged in using Interact's services.

Sustained engagement and leadership of various expert networks can have a far-reaching effect. Experience in the period 2014-2020 showed that bringing actors together, unifying their views and opinions and channelling these to the right institutions/fora, at the right time, can influence decision and policy making. As Interact is more and more recognised as the hub for Interreg discussions, there is a greater opportunity for this role to be strengthened. As the Case-based Impact Evaluation reflected, Interact is often in the position of a change agent as initiatives implemented trigger changes for the whole community.

There are many important opportunities for Interact to develop into a more efficient and leaner organisation. For example, simplification provisions (e.g. flat rates) should be also adopted by Interact to ensure greater efficiency of internal processes and procedures. More targeted promotion of Interact's achievements at all stages of programme implementation is needed to increase recognition of the solutions, and of Interact as the author of them. As discussed under weaknesses, such recognition among target groups, and with a particular view of engaging new target groups, should lead to stronger support for the programme and in particular to stronger ownership of the results. While the role of Interact in initiating and promoting cooperation and coordination among actors within and beyond Interreg is key, an important success in the future can be achieved if some networks and processes become more durable. As pointed out by the evaluation, with regards to MRS, this would imply working with stakeholders to ensure self-sustaining nature of the activities in the future.

Threats

Using the experience from the 2014-2020 period, it is necessary to maintain the same principle of coordination within the interregional strand: By establishing a clear division of roles between all the four programmes, programmes' stakeholders remain confident that each programme has its genuine role, adds value, that overlaps are avoided, and synergies are capitalised on throughout the interregional strand.

Discussions between Member States actors during the preparation of the programme have made it clear that Interact's primary focus should not deviate from Interreg actors. The concern is also linked to loss of specific niche for Interact in this case. Interact plans to develop a targeted service portfolio for engagement with IJG programmes based on the experiences gained to date with MRS, Article 96 (of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006) and in consultation with the IJG and other relevant stakeholders. While this can be treated as an opportunity for the future, it is necessary that associated risks are identified (depending on the scope of work) and a strategy is set in place on how to alleviate these. For example, the need for new profiles and competences of staff has to be understood. Advice and input from national authorities and Member States will be particularly valuable in this context.

In the 2021-2027 period, proposals for reduced co-financing rate coupled with flat rate on TA reimbursements may lead to lack of resources in Interreg at least in some stages of the programme life-cycle. It can be anticipated that this, in turn, may reduce participation in

Interact services (seminars, workshops, networks, etc.), especially those of face-to-face nature. Interact needs to prepare for such scenario and invest more resources in providing alternative solutions to face-to-face meetings. Such a scenario also brings a benefit in helping to reduce the carbon-footprint of Interact activities, and support the Green Deal. Interact's existing platform of online events and tools, enhanced by the experiences of online service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported by new skills and technology, means that Interact IV is well placed to offer virtual services to the Interreg community.

Online learning and Interact's online platform have become important tools in this respect. Interact is also analysing its cooperation partners, those who provide complementary services, and those whose service mechanism and target groups bare resemblance to those of Interact. The argument that Interact's products are free of charge should not be taken for granted as other institutions are also developing/have developed knowledge in Interreg. It is reassuring that according to the analysis of programme participation in Interact events in 2020, all programmes have been engaged in the activities. It is however key for Interact to continue to innovate, remain close to its target groups and strive for excellence of service.

Finally, the political context within which Interact operates has also an effect on the programme. Interact cannot be separated from Interreg and political developments that have an effect on Interreg also effect Interact as well. In the 2014-2020 period, both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the political and economic climate, in addition to COVID-19's traumatic health impact and the tragic loss of life.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(3)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
Interreg specific objective "A better cooperation governance"	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	Service delivery	<i>[2 000 per objective]</i> The selection of policy objective is limited to one in case of Interact IV in line with Interreg regulation, focusing on boosting the effectiveness of cohesion policy across the Union in particular in the Interreg programmes, but also beyond. This kind of increased effectiveness is reached by capacity building, particularly by identifying and facilitating the transfer of good practices, providing guidance and expertise in solving implementation bottlenecks, as well as promoting the use of innovative approaches, promoting EGTC and strengthening the visibility of Interreg.

2. Priorities [300]

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3)

2.1. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

Text field: [300]

Service delivery.

2.1.1. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders.

2.1.2 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Text field [7000]

Within the Interreg Specific Objective "A better Governance" Interact has identified three perspectives which target the enhancement of institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders for effective implementation of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actions. These perspectives seek to: Manage processes and procedures better and more effectively; Work better in a cooperation context; and, Improve the evidence base and visibility of Interreg.

Building on the experience of promoting cooperation and coordination across various implementing stakeholders of MRS, and more recently SBS, Interact intends to continue to support existing territorial frameworks, their actors and their outward orientation whenever they benefit Interreg and promote cooperation as effective policy tool. This includes capacity-building approaches, staff exchange methods, cooperation models and experiences for actors within and outside of Interreg. These actions are embedded in the perspectives identified below.

a) Increasing efficiency: Strengthening the management capacity of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actors

Reducing inefficiencies in the management of Interreg programmes and, through pilots, in cooperation actions as well.

Proposed actions are clustered under three categories:

- Harmonisation of approaches, focusing on interpretation and harmonisation of rules, information flows and procedures for Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders in line with Interact's mandate, including harmonisation pilots for supporting cooperation actions as named above.
- Simplification of approaches, pursued in structures governing the Interreg programmes in rules and procedures for programme and project management and information flows, and through pilot processes in cooperation actions as named above.
- Efficient programme management to support leaner management, clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities, better internal communication, and transparency of flows.

Within these three categories Interreg programmes will be the main target group, while the support to cooperation actions will be implemented based on pilot projects.

Actions should seek to alleviate bottlenecks in Interreg and promote gains from optimising the management of the programmes. Some will lead to budget savings, others to reduction of bureaucracy and will target a shift from administration to quality. This will require effective engagement with the target groups. Under this perspective, the focus is not on the individual but on collaboration between programmes and specific programme management functions to support system change. It is about mobilising and facilitating networks of experts to engage practitioners, legislators and decision-makers alike in resolving the identified bottlenecks. For example, by developing joint tools for programme and project management. In specific cases, networks will be complemented by targeted events, which specifically seek to exchange, inspire and disseminate best practice and tools, as well as on-demand advisories for specific programmes for targeted support on specific implementation issues.

b) Enabling individuals: Strengthening the capacity to work in cooperation programmes and context

Enabling actors involved in the management and implementation of Interreg programmes and, through pilots, in cooperation actions to cooperate, and to steer the programmes/actions and the human resources in an improved, more inspired or visionary way.

Proposed actions are clustered under three categories:

- Institutional knowledge and competence to support learning and development of those working in the Interreg programmes and in cooperation context at large. It seeks to develop the skills to better manage the implementation of programmes and projects, and to strengthen skills and expertise to find new ways of managing cooperation between programmes/funding instruments.
- Strengthen cooperation and coordination skills among Interreg programme actors (including EGTC actors) and of those actors involved in the management and implementation of territorial governance frameworks and initiatives such as MRS and SBS. Pilot actions will also target the IJG goal.
- Innovative approaches, to support actions that promote innovative tools and methods in a cooperation context and for cooperation purposes.

The starting point is to strengthen the skills of the individual professionals who compose organisations. The focus is on development and support of individuals to do their job better or work in a different way, use innovativeness and creativity not only in the context of Interreg but in other cooperation frameworks and actions as well. By that, shifts in organisational/institutional culture are targeted as well. In order to achieve this, activities that support training and experimentation are required, Interact will also need to develop tools to support this. Trainings, both in person and online, will address the particular needs of individual professionals, as well as across functions for continuous learning and development. Targeted

working groups and peer-to-peer actions will test and elaborate new methods, tools, and approaches in cooperation context and programmes.

c) Interreg visibility: Strengthening the capacity to capture and communicate programme and project results and to increase visibility

Increasing the evidence base of Interreg results and making Interreg achievements and the cooperation process more visible to all target groups, including citizens and decision makers.

Proposed actions are clustered under three categories:

- Building and gathering thematic knowledge and result awareness, aggregation and analysis of Interreg results, and promote coordination and capitalisation as a mainstream management process in programmes.
- Communication of results, where integration of communication in the programme life-cycle, communication and promotion of results and building knowledge of what to promote and to whom are sought.
- Visibility of Interreg, where promoting strategic communication, deploying joint initiatives to reach out to relevant actors, overall visibility of Interreg in relevant fora, and the conceptualisation of cooperation processes are sought.

The actions identified take as a starting point Interreg as a whole. The focus is not on an individual, a body, a function or an organisation but on the instrument as a whole. This requires activities that reinforce the aim. Raising the overall profile and visibility through performing targeted analysis, leading thematic networks to deepen the understanding of results and the added value of Interreg in the bigger picture of cohesion policy, are at the core. Targeted stakeholder outreach through conferences, web tools, promotion campaigns and other solutions supporting visibility, and empowering capitalisation and strategic communication as integrated functions through seminars and workshops are promoted.

For the INTERACT and ESPON programme:

Reference point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

Definition of single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Text field [7000]

The extensive knowledge and expertise gained by Interact since its inception is its foremost asset and key to its successes. To keep this knowledge, Interact beneficiaries shall be kept and enhanced. No additional operations and beneficiaries shall be selected, in the meaning of the Regulation i.e. recipients of grants. Interact IV will continue with a limited set of beneficiaries. Exclusively the four decentralised beneficiaries identified for the previous

Interact III programme. The permanent Interact Offices with their seats in Turku, Valencia, Viborg and Vienna will implement the programme's service delivery, involving all target groups. All four offices have been part of Interact almost from its launch and have proven over the years that they have the capacity to deliver high quality services and that they can quickly adapt to face new challenges. Interact IV will not select and implement projects in its usual Interreg meaning, instead all activities shall be run by these offices. These activities shall be set in an annual work plan, which is based on the needs of the target groups, and this plan shall be approved and monitored by the Interact Monitoring Committee. Therefore, Interact beneficiaries may be defined as those public institutions, which are entrusted by Member States to implement the whole programme, through activities carried out by their four regional offices, in respect of the management functions of the Interact Managing Authority. The joint human resources policy among Interact Offices shall also be focused on keeping and developing knowledge and skills as its foremost asset.

2.1.3 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point(c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participants	4,590	17,850
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	RCO85	Participations in joint training schemes	Number of participants	612	2,380
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	90	350

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	Number of certificates of completion	0	2020	2,009	Interact IV monitoring tools (database)	

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	Interact specific indicator	Institutions using knowledge/skills acquired through Interact services	Percentage (%) of institutions	0	2020	70%	Survey	
Service delivery	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities	Interact specific indicator	Institutions using solutions developed through Interact services	Percentage (%) of institutions	0	2020	70%	Survey	

2.1.4 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Text field [7000]

While Interact has been serving the Interreg community since the 2000-2006 period, the 2014-2020 iteration (Interact III) introduced new wider target groups to the programme. This was a natural development as the strategic involvement of Interact engaged the programme with the new target groups, having the thematic scope or the stakeholders beyond Interreg. The strategic involvement of these stakeholders has been important, sharing a bigger picture of European cooperation, and again it will continue to be crucial to Interact and Interreg's success in the future.

One good example of this is Interact's work on the preparation for the 2021-2027 period, when Interact brought Interreg programmes, Member States, the Commission and other relevant stakeholders together for the 'better future' of European cooperation. However, there are numerous other examples, where the development and evolution of Interact's relationships with the new stakeholder groups have produced positive results.

Interact will continue to focus on the service delivery for its main target audience – Interreg programme bodies – in the 2021-2027 period. Strong links, trust and commitment has been built during the previous programming periods. As the Interreg family will be extended to include the Interreg NEXT programmes, it is anticipated that these programmes will more intensively seek to join Interact's services. Interact starts the 2021-2027 period with an already expanded core target audience, the wider Interreg community. At the same time, Interact is ahead of new ambitions and challenges, the CPR calls for Interact to support cooperation in wider terms, including the IJG actors under Interact's service portfolio, in explicitly and carefully selected targeted activities.

In general, the target groups considered in Interact’s context as the most relevant actors that either will receive the Interact service, or be engaged by Interact, being part of the change agents’ community. Therefore, in addition of being the recipient of the service, there are also two other relevant roles for the target groups, having the role of influencers or ambassadors. The target groups naturally reflect the nature and context of what Interact plans to deliver within its service portfolio during 2021-2027 period.

Interact IV programme proposes three perspectives for 2021-2017 service delivery, focusing on:

- Perspective 1 – Increasing efficiency: Strengthening the management capacity of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actors
- Perspective 2 – Enabling individuals: Strengthening the capacity of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actors to work in cooperation programmes and context
- Perspective 3 – Interreg visibility: Strengthening the capacity of Interreg programmes to capture and communicate programme and project results and to increase visibility

Involvement of the target groups in the future service delivery is reflected against the three perspectives (in 2.1.2 above). Some target groups will be heavily involved in all three perspectives, having different roles (receiver, influencer, ambassador of service). On the other hand, some of the target groups may have limited or no involvement in certain perspectives. The list below is the generic overview. For the more specific relationship between Interact IV perspectives and the target groups, please see the Interact IV Intervention logic matrix.

Interact IV will engage with and involve the three main stakeholder groups:

- a) Interreg programme bodies (Interreg, Interreg-IPA CBC, Interreg NEXT); with their specific role as the core receiver of Interact service delivery. They have often heavy involvement in service delivery, as sparring partners within the exchange of experiences, or ambassadors, linked to strategic policy results. This target group covers more explicitly:
 - Managing Authorities
 - Joint Secretariats
 - National controllers
 - Bodies responsible for Accounting function
 - Audit Authorities
 - Representatives of Monitoring Committees.
- b) National/ regional co-operation stakeholders, with their specific role as the receiver of Interact service delivery, quite often with more limited involvement as the target group above. This target group has also the role of sparring partners, “influencers” within the

exchange of experiences, sharing practices and promoting achievements of cooperation, linked to strategic policy results. This target group covers more specifically:

- IJG actors (national and regional programmes)
- National/Regional Coordination bodies, National contact persons/points
- Macro-regional/Sea basin strategies' actors and other actors involved in cooperation instruments
- EGTC
- Key cooperation partners on specific themes, CLLDs, ITIs and other territorial tools (ref. Article 22 CPR)

c) Wider policy actors, with specific roles as strategic ambassadors and influencers. The involvement of this target group is very heterogeneous, from being the key stakeholders in service delivery to the very limited or often indirect involvement. The key element is the role as providers of policy interpretations and partners in strategic change. More specific examples of some of these actors will include:

- European Commission, in particular DG REGIO and other units (e.g. Audit, Evaluation, Better Implementation)
- European Commission, other DGs
- Committee of the Regions (CoR)
- Other EU institutions
- European-wide associations, cross-border organisations
- EU-wide financing institutions and programmes, EU-wide financial engineering stakeholders
- Interreg project partners, EGTCs managing projects
- Target groups of cooperation promotion (e.g. local authorities, citizens, wider public, media, universities).

Target group involvement will be reviewed, and where necessary further specified in accordance with emerging needs of Interreg programmes.

2.1.5 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: point (e)(iv) of Article 17(3)

Text field [7000]

Not relevant for Interact.

2.1.6 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

Text field [7000]

Not relevant for Interact.

2.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1 – Service delivery	ERDF	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	135 – Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and interregional context	45,000,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1 – Service delivery	ERDF	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	01 – Grant	45,000,000

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1 – Service delivery	ERDF	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	48 – No territorial targeting	45,000,000

3. Financing plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)	6,053,038	6,174,099	6,297,581	6,423,532	6,552,003	6,683,043	6,816,704	45,000,000
IPA III CBC ¹								
NDICI-CBC ²								
IPA III ³								
NDICI ⁴								
OCTP ⁵								
Interreg Funds ⁶								
Total	6,053,038	6,174,099	6,297,581	6,423,532	6,552,003	6,683,043	6,816,704	45,000,000

¹ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

² Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

³ Interreg B and C.

⁴ Interreg B and C.

⁵ Interreg B, C and D.

⁶ ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.

3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f)(ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 8

Policy objective No	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)	
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)				
Interreg specific objective "A better cooperation governance"	Priority 1	ERDF	45,000,000	45,000,000	41,666,667	3,333,333	11,250,000	11,250,000	0	56,250,000	80%	162 801	
		IPA III CBC ⁷											
		NDICI-CBC ⁸											
		IPA III ⁹											
		NDICI ¹⁰											
		OCTP ¹¹											
		Interreg Funds ¹²											
Total		All funds	45,000,000	45,000,000	41,666,667	3,333,333	11,250,000	11,250,000	0	56,250,000	80%	162 801	

⁷ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

⁸ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

⁹ Interreg B and C.

¹⁰ Interreg B and C.

¹¹ Interreg B, C and D.

¹² ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.

4. Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3)

Text field [10 000]

The identification of the relevant stakeholders is in the hands of the MA, in consultation with the participating countries. Building the partnership between Interact and the participating countries is based on the programme priorities and territorial specificities, and in turn, this helps to define the specific needs of programmes from Interact. The organisations included should either be able to contribute to the programme or Interact will potentially have an impact on them.

Interact established the below guiding principles:

1. Relevance of the potential partners for the programme objective, i.e. ‘A better cooperation governance’
2. Territorial specificities and
3. Proportionality of the approach.

In Interact IV, where no projects in the usual Interreg sense are financed, and services are offered to the Interreg community and beyond, the majority of the members of our partnership are our target groups (see 2.1.4).

Relevance of partners in view of the programme objective

Interact IV focusses on ‘better cooperation governance’ and therefore, the type of partners will be institutions such as public authorities and administration.

The members of the partnership should be the authorities in charge of the management and control of Interreg programmes. In addition, external cooperation programmes and in specific cases, IJG programmes could also be members of the partnership.

Specific entities to be involved include MAs, JSs, management verification bodies, audit bodies, national representatives, and indirectly project beneficiaries. This includes also specific cooperation stakeholders such as the coordinators of the macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, Commission, EP, CoR, EGTCs and others.

Interact also creates linkages with similar European bodies (CPMR, MOT, AEBR, TESIM, CBIB+).

Territorial specificities

Interact IV is a programme for the entire EU and the associated, candidate and neighbouring countries. Interact IV covers the EU plus Norway and Switzerland as the financing countries and also offers services for EU external cooperation programmes – such as Interreg-IPA CBC, Interreg NEXT, and OMR – based on pre-identified needs. Interact IV will seek to involve partners from involved non-MSs, where they are directly relevant for the implementation of Interreg programmes.

Proportionality of the approach

The application of this principle is sought to help to reduce the number of potential partners in proportion to the programme size and budget. In defining a proportionate approach, the balance between allowing a diversity of representation, and in ensuring an engaged and effective structure needs to be found.

In the implementation phase, Interact IV will seek to maintain a large number of partners involved. However, given the programme covers all EU MSs as well as many neighbouring countries, participation in the MC meetings shall be limited to the representation of umbrella organisations at EU level.

Actions taken to facilitate a wide involvement of the partners in the preparation of the programme

Interact conducted a public consultation in November 2020 with the aim to understand if there were any errors, issues or omissions in the framing of the programme document. Following numerous communication actions to ensure the consultation was well published, individuals and organisations had the opportunity to comment on the draft programme in a three-week window. Comments could be made through an online event, or through a survey. The responses received through this survey have been carefully reviewed and the feedback has been considered alongside comments from the PC, which both highlighted specific concerns in the work towards wider cooperation actors. The new Intervention logic matrix has further clarified the focus of Interact and responds to the main concerns raised. Other comments have been retained for future consideration.

Partner involvement during implementation

Interact aims to take on board the partners' opinion in its implementation and evaluation. Their feedback will be included in the various proposals to be discussed when planning, assessing and evaluating Interact activities.

In case an Interreg programme or another stakeholder would like to input to the work of the MC, they should contact the NCP, the relevant MC member or the MA, who will collect the

inputs from the respective territories or stakeholder(s). This supports the proportionality approach as set out above.

The needs of the Interreg community shall be regularly assessed through needs assessment surveys, feedback collected during events and daily contacts with programmes. All partners will be given the opportunity to participate in the annual needs assessment to support the development of targeted services. Finally, partners will be considered for the participation in the evaluation process (via targeted surveys).

Next to these options to have a say in the Interact IV delivery system the MC members often represent institutions in charge of the coordination of the Interreg community in their respective country. Thus they are well aware of the specific needs and practices.

Regional approach

Bearing in mind the ambitions set in the perspectives (see 2.1.2), a close and more personal relationship with our key target groups will form a crucial role in ensuring Interact achieves the intended successes. Thus Interact will seek to strengthen its regional approach without breaking the overarching inclusive approach.

Working with programme procedures and in general management structures with the view of making them more efficient and effective requires a good understanding of these processes in their local context. This local context may define a boundary to which harmonisation stops being possible, and good knowledge will help Interact understand the real boundaries to which harmonisation and simplification can be applied in specific contexts.

Additionally, encouraging cooperation and coordination between Interreg and IJG actors will require a strong regional and national perspective. It is always done in context of territorial and/or policy framework (e.g. given policy objectives, Smart Specialisation Strategies, territorial and local development strategies implemented through ITI, CLLD and other territorial tools ref. to Article 22 CPR). Knowing these frameworks will help to identify the synergies, and the greatest potential for cooperation that can benefit Interreg.

In line with the place-based approach, most of the programme results will have a local/regional impact and context. Understanding this regional diversity should help understand the results better and thus identify good communication material.

Therefore, we believe that a regional approach, as used in Interact III, can also be used to a large extent in Interact IV.

Where appropriate, the programme could further strengthen its coordination with NCPs and national authorities in view of a more effective integration and harmonisation of capacity building and coordination initiatives carried out at interregional and national level. The NCPs

may also be supported with specific tools (e.g. based on SCOs) or expertise to more effectively address the new target group of mainstream programmes. Improved communication and knowledge sharing from and to these groups could also enable specific regional/national good practices to be identified and shared with other regions. Such an approach could also make it easier to evaluate how Interact covers specific area needs and support the involvement of all areas of Europe.

Principles

— Balance effort/cost/benefit

As Interact resources are limited, services are devoted to a certain region, MS or number of programmes only when this is the best method of providing the service for the needs of these stakeholders. A balance between regional approach and exchange across EU will be kept when planning activities addressed to specific areas. Programme managers of a regional area should have the possibility to exchange with programmes of other areas to promote cross-fertilisation.

— Language and backgrounds balance

In the Interact team, the balance of different languages and backgrounds across offices is overall assured. Nonetheless, it is not possible that Interact teams cover all languages in all fields of expertise. The programme language is English, and services shall be provided in English language. Regional/national advisories in national languages are still possible, in cooperation with NCPs, within the limits of resources and knowledge available in Interact.

— Build up regional knowledge

Interact Offices build up knowledge of the programmes and national networks in the area that is also useful in horizontal services.

— Open networks

A knowledge network is necessarily open, because in principle there is very limited knowledge creation/sharing in closed circles. The regional/national networks shall also benefit from Europe-wide knowledge provided either by Interact or externally. Thus, any geographically focused service will include examples from outside the geography as well. Participation in network meetings shall be kept open as a general rule, in order to allow for real knowledge exchange.

- Interest-based work

The basic principle to make regional networks work well, is that they have an actual need and interest in working together and exchanging. Therefore, the key of success is based on the topics, to be agreed by both Interact and the network members, considering the needs and interest of more and less experienced Interreg staff.

Geographical coverage

Interact shall assure that all participating countries and programmes will benefit from their involvement in Interact IV.

Additionally:

- Analysis of programmes participation shall include the territorial aspects;
- Evaluation plan will include regional analysis and measures;
- Communication plans will include an analysis and specific measures for the regions/countries (e.g. the ones not sufficiently participating or using Interact services).

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3)

Text field [4 500]

Interact offers specialist services to stakeholders, including other programmes. This chapter sets out how Interact will approach its communication and visibility actions, in order to ensure the effectiveness of its work, and the work of the target audiences.

Objectives

The principle focus of the communication objectives are to complement the delivery of the programme's overall objective, as well as the identified specific objectives.

In order to do this, Communication objectives shall be set in order to:

1. Promote Interact and the use of key tools and services that support cooperation.
2. Support the wider dissemination of best practice and knowledge amongst target audiences.
3. Demonstrate that 'Cooperation Works!';
 - a) through the achievements of Interact.
 - b) through the collated achievements of Interreg.

c) through sharing knowledge with other cooperation actors.

The focus of communication shall vary throughout the period, and shall be regularly reviewed. At the start of the period, supporting relationship building with new audiences, as well as ensuring the dissemination of shared interpretations of new cooperation rules will be among the priorities.

Target audiences

Interact's target audiences are set out above (2.1.4). Interact's primary target audiences already work in cooperation, but may not be aware of all the resources and tools that can support them. A key specific focus in the next period shall be to ensure Interact reaches out beyond existing relationships, particularly where new audiences are to be engaged.

Interact communication shall also prioritise working with wider policy actors, to further develop partnerships and create Interact ambassadors. These ambassadors will need up to date knowledge and information on solutions developed by Interact, in order to share relevant work with third parties.

Interact shall have regard for the opportunity to use the aggregated achievements of Interreg programmes to promote pan-European cooperation towards citizens, and to support programmes in more effectively reaching their target audiences. Through these activities, Interact shall support the communication of Interreg towards European citizens.

Communication channels

Interact shall maintain a website, which will be the primary source of information and resources for Interact's target audiences. Interact shall also maintain an exchange platform, with easy access from the website, which enables peer-to-peer exchange.

In promoting Interact's work, effective electronic communication tools shall be used. Maintaining an up to date contact database will provide an effective tool to reach key audiences via regular email newsletters. In addition, other electronic communication tools will be utilised.

While the primary focus of Interact efforts shall be electronic, reflecting the professional audience, key items may be printed. In particular, for large scale EU events, which offer opportunities for networking and to raise the awareness of Interact, and Interreg.

Social media outreach

Interact has built an effective presence on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. While the audiences on the three platforms vary, all three tools offer effective outreach for the

programme. Interact will continue to monitor other social media platforms to understand where there are effective opportunities to reach out on a professional basis to target audiences.

In addition to Interact's own accounts, other accounts managed by Interact that focus on promoting all Interreg activities shall continue.

Planned budget

Interact shall plan to spend at least 0.5% of the programmes total budget on communication, subject to final budgetary agreements. This shall ensure the provision of an effective programme website, branded templates for materials and promotional materials, as well as other printed and digital materials to support the work of the programme.

Monitoring and evaluation

The role of communication in supporting the programmes overall objectives shall be carefully considered. While many promotional aspects will not be included in the programme's formal indicators, the role of communication in connecting the right person with the relevant solutions will need to be considered.

Tools such as social media statistics and website analytics will provide insights into the effectiveness of communication generally, and more specific evaluations will take place as part of Interact's monitoring and evaluation work.

6. Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3), Article 24

Text field [7 000]

Not relevant for Interact.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(6)

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing authority	Bratislava Self Governing Region / Interact department		

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
National authority (for programmes with participating third countries, if appropriate)	N/A		
Audit authority	Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic/ Section of audit and control		
Group of auditors representatives	N/A		
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic		

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6)

Text field [3 500]

The MA will be assisted by a small joint secretariat (Interact Secretariat, IS) and will contract the decentralised implementing bodies, henceforth called the Interact Offices, which actually deliver the programme to the target groups.

Strong collaboration will be ensured between the Managing Authority, the Interact Secretariat and the Interact Offices concerning the joint elaboration and the implementation of annual and multi-annual work plans.

Due to the nature of the programme, Interact IV will not implement projects within the usual Interreg sense, instead a limited set of beneficiaries throughout the whole implementation of the programme and as such, there is no need to provide information to beneficiaries.

Accordingly, the small secretariat unit, set up within the MA, in the organisational structure of the Bratislava Self Governing Region, shall mainly assist the MA and the MC in carrying out their respective functions, fulfilling both coordination (under Priority 1) and technical management functions and primarily being responsible for the below tasks:

- Setting up the framework of service delivery: elaborating and further developing programme-level procedures and related templates (e.g. related to annual work planning) and key documents (e.g. the strategic multiannual document and internal guidance);
- Coordinating the actual implementation of programme-level processes, including facilitating the annual work planning exercise, compiling on the basis of Interact Offices' inputs the annual work plans, as well as organising and following up coordination meetings, etc.;

- Collecting and compiling inputs of Interact Offices into programme-level documents;
- Contributing to the content and financial monitoring tasks under the responsibility of the MA;
- Contributing to and fulfilling programme-level reporting obligations;
- Providing (setting up, maintaining and further developing) the joint IT infrastructure of the programme, including the programme monitoring system, online collaborative work platform, etc.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

Text field [10 500]

For Interact IV, beneficiaries are understood as the hosting institutions of the Member States hosting Interact Secretariat and Interact Offices. The beneficiaries are liable for any irregularity they may have caused. Any unduly paid amounts are recovered from the specific beneficiary by the Managing Authority.

If the Managing Authority does not succeed in securing repayment from one of the beneficiaries, the Member State, on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located, shall reimburse the Managing Authority any amounts unduly paid to that beneficiary. Each participating Member State hosting the specific beneficiary, by signing Interreg regulation Article 16(5) agreement explicitly agrees to have this subsidiary liability and to timely pay back any unduly paid amount to the account of the programme. The Managing Authority is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union. Any such occurrences and measures will be timely discussed and agreed upon in the first subsequent meeting of the Monitoring Committee.

When any relevant authority of the Member State detects an irregularity, it will timely inform the Managing Authority and the Audit Authority.

In case of suspension of payments by the European Commission, due to errors, irregularities or even external factors, such as cash flow gaps at European level, the Managing Authority shall inform the beneficiaries and the MC about the suspension and the reasons for it immediately after being notified.

With this information the Managing Authority shall also convene all bodies directly affected by the suspension, in particular the beneficiaries, in order to develop a plan to address the causes of the suspension, in line with the indications provided by the European Commission.

The Monitoring Committee shall be informed in all steps, in particular on the measures agreed with the European Commission, on the progresses and on the consequences of the suspension in the service delivery by Interact.

Even though Member States not hosting an Interact body will not be beneficiary of programme funding, they will share the benefit from programme services. In accordance with point (c) of Article 17(6) of the Interreg Regulation, the programme shall set out apportionment of liabilities among the participating Member States and, where applicable, third partner countries or OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the Managing Authority or the Commission.

For Interact IV, all Member States have therefore agreed to share liability in proportion to their share of co-financing, but not exceeding the amount of their respective national contribution, in case of flat rate corrections, caused by decisions made by the programme Monitoring Committee. Programme bodies and/or beneficiaries and/or hosting Member States are liable for irregularities, including those ones having a systemic nature, they caused.

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Table 10: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)		X
From the adoption programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)		X

APPENDICES – Not applicable for Interact

Map of the programme area

Appendix 1: Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Appendix 3: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable

Appendix 4: Acronyms and abbreviations

Appendix 5: Interact IV intervention logic matrix (separate document)

Appendix 1: Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 94 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR))

Date of submitting the proposal	

This Appendix is not required when EU-level simplified cost options established by the delegated act referred to in Article 94(4) of CPR are used.

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the simplified cost option will be applied in % (estimate)	Type(s) of operation covered		Indicator triggering reimbursement		Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	Type of simplified cost option (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates)	Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the simplified cost option
				Code ¹³	Description	Code ¹⁴	Description			

¹³ This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table1 of Annex I CPR.

¹⁴ This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.

B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

Did the Managing Authority receive support from an external company to set out the simplified costs below?

If so, please specify which external company: Yes/No – Name of external company

Types of operation:

1.1. Description of the operation type including the timeline for implementation	
1.2 Specific objective	
1.3 Indicator triggering reimbursement ¹⁵	
1.4 Unit of measurement for indicator triggering reimbursement	
1.5 Standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.6 Amount per unit of measurement or percentage (for flat rates) of the simplified cost option	
1.7 Categories of costs covered by unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.8 Do these categories of costs cover all eligible expenditure for the operation? (Y/N)	
1.9 Adjustment(s) method	
1.10 Verification of the achievement of the unit of measurement – describe what document(s) will be used to verify the achievement of the unit of measurement – describe what will be checked and by whom during management verifications, – describe what the arrangements are to collect and store the data/documents	
1.11 Possible perverse incentives or problems caused by this indicator, how they could be mitigated, and the estimated level of risk (high/medium/low)	
1.12 Total amount (national and EU) expected to be reimbursed by the Commission on this basis	

¹⁵ Several complementary indicators (for instance one output indicator and one result indicator) are possible for one type of operation. In these cases, fields 1.3 to 1.11 should be filled in for each indicator.

C. Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data; where the data are stored; cut-off dates; validation, etc.):

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 88(2) of CPR is relevant to the type of operation:

3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission:

4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate:

5. Assessment of the audit authority or authorities of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data:

Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

Article 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Date of submitting the proposal	

This Appendix is not required when amounts for EU-level financing not linked to costs established by the delegated act referred to in Article 95(4) of CPR are used.

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation covered		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Corresponding indicator name(s)		Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	[Envisaged reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code ¹⁶	Description		Code ¹⁷	Description		

¹⁶ This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex I to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

¹⁷ This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.

B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

1.1. Description of the operation type			
1.2 Specific objective			
1.3 Conditions to be fulfilled or results to be achieved			
1.4 Deadline for fulfilment of conditions or results to be achieved			
1.5 Unit of measurement for conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission			
1.6 Intermediate deliverables (if applicable) triggering reimbursement by the Commission with schedule for reimbursements	Intermediate deliverables	Envisaged date	Amounts (in EUR)
1.7 Total amount (including EU and national funding)			
1.8 Adjustment(s) method			
1.9 Verification of the achievement of the result or condition (and where relevant, the intermediate deliverables) — describe what document(s) will be used to verify the achievement of the result or condition and where relevant, each of the intermediate deliverables) — describe how management verifications (including on-the-spot) will be carried out, and by whom — describe what arrangements will be made to collect and store the data/documents			
1.10 Use of grants in the form of financing not linked to costs/ Does the grant provided by Member State to beneficiaries take the form of financing not linked to costs? [Y/N] ¹⁸			
1.11 Arrangements to ensure the audit trail Please list the body(ies) responsible for these arrangements.			

Appendix 3

List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable – Article 17(3)

Text field [2 000]

Not applicable for Interact

Appendix 4

Acronyms and abbreviations

AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
CBIB+	Cross Border Institution Building
CLLD	Community-lead Local Development
CoR	Committee of the Regions
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
CPR	Common provisions regulation (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)
DG	European Commission Directorate-General
DG REGIO	European Commission Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
eMS	electronic Monitoring System
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
HIT	Harmonised Implementation Tools
IGJ	Investment for Jobs and Growth
IJG	Investment for Growth and Jobs
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IT	Information Technology
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MOT	Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière

MRS	Macro-regional strategy
MS	Member State
NCP	National Contact Point/Person
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OCTP	Overseas Countries and Territories Programme
OMR	Outermost regions
PC	Programming Committee
SBS	Sea-basin strategy
SCO	Simplified Cost Option
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TA	Technical Assistance
TESIM	Technical Support to the Implementation and Management of ENI CBC programmes

Appendix 5

Interact IV intervention logic matrix (separate document)
