Programme Manual

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Introduction

This reference manual is essential reading for anyone involved in any aspect of implementing or participating in the Interreg Europe programme, such as applicants, project partners, financial managers and controllers.

It has three main parts: Part A covers the programme's general features, with Parts B and C covering the programme's two strategic actions, its **interregional cooperation projects** and its **Policy Learning Platform,** respectively. Part B focuses on projects and provides detailed information on the whole project life cycle, covering development, the application process, selection, implementation and closure.

Key words are highlighted in bold. Additional information can be found in footnotes. Throughout the manual, definitions and examples are presented in boxes. These will help the reader to understand key points.

The manual supplements the Interreg Europe programme approved by the Commission and further specifies the programme's **mandatory** rules. It also provides **recommendations**. **Applicants who do not follow these recommendations will have to provide clear justifications for not doing so in their application form.** An overview of the main recommendations is provided in the introduction of section B (Projects).

Additional information and documents on calls for proposals (e.g., terms of reference) are also available on the programme's website: *www.interregeurope.eu*

Important note for applicants

Applicants should read this entire manual carefully. Part B follows the project cycle and *section 3* is dedicated to project development. Nonetheless, the information provided in the rest of the document is also important for preparing a good quality application. Instructions on how to apply can be found in *section 4.2* and *section 4.3.1* provides details on eligibility requirements. Respecting the requirements in these sections is crucial to ensuring that an application is not rejected on procedural grounds.

Applicants should also note that, for the 2021-2027 programming period, all application and reporting tasks will only be possible through the Interreg Europe *Portal* (hereinafter referred to as the Portal).

Interreg
Europe:
key features

A.

PROGRAMME

1. Programme summary

1.1 What is the programme's objective?

Through its *cohesion policy,* the European Union is working to reduce disparities in development and quality of life in European 'regions'. Cohesion policy supports actions that helps European regions to be more innovative, more sustainable and more inclusive; thus improving quality of life for its peoples and communities.

The bulk of the funds available for reducing regional disparities is managed at the regional or national levels within each country. Nonetheless, the EU believes that regional development can also be improved through interregional cooperation 'across borders'.

The Interreg Europe programme was therefore designed to support interregional learning among policy relevant organisations across Europe. The programme's objective is to enable public authorities and other relevant organisations to actively learn from the experience of other regions. This is a learning process which involves identifying, analysing and transferring good practices with the aim of improving regional development policy instruments and ultimately delivering solutions that benefit all citizens.

'Region' and 'regional development policy'

In the Interreg Europe programme, the terms 'region' and 'regional development policy' are used in a broad sense. 'Region' refers to any territory represented by a public authority. Depending on the issue addressed and the characteristics of the territories involved, it can relate to any of the different administrative levels that contribute to regional development (e.g., municipality, city, county, province, region, country). In projects, the number of 'regions' involved is the same as the number of policy instruments addressed. 'Regional development policy' refers to any policy developed at local, regional and, when relevant, national levels.

1.2 How does the programme work?

The Interreg Europe programme has an Interreg funds budget of EUR 394.5 million for the 2021-2027 period. By allocating this entire budget to a single overarching 'priority' ('a better cooperation governance'), the programme will cover a wide range of regional development topics, within the scope of cohesion policy. Interreg Europe's field of intervention will span the 5 policy objectives defined in Article 3 of the ERDF regulation (EU) 2021/1058 (further information can be found in *section 2.5* below). The programme nonetheless recognises the need to concentrate its resources on the most relevant and urgent policy challenges facing European regions. It will therefore devote the largest share of its Interreg funds budget (80%) to the topics covered under Policy Objective 1: 'A smarter Europe', Policy Objective 2: 'A greener Europe' and to certain topics covered under Policy Objective 4: 'A more social Europe'. The remaining budget (20%) will be available for the topics covered under the three remaining Policy Objectives.

The programme will finance two complementary types of strategic action:

a) **Interregional cooperation projects:** Partnerships made up of policy-relevant organisations from different countries in Europe which work together for 4 years to exchange experience on a shared regional development issue.

b) **A Policy Learning Platform**: Provides a space for continuous or on demand learning where any policy-relevant organisation[1] dealing with regional development policies in Europe can find solutions and request expert support to improve its policies.

1.3 Who is eligible for funding?

The programme area consists of the 27 EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland, and 7 EU candidate countries joining the Interreg Europe programme (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine). The latter are referred to in this document as the "7 EU candidate countries".

Organisations relevant to regional development policies and based in the programme area are eligible for Interreg Europe funding. These include:

- National, regional, or local public authorities
- Institutions governed by public law (e.g., regional development agencies, business support organisations, universities)
- Private non-profit bodies.

Further information on partnership and eligibility can be found in *section 3.4* (Partnership) of the present document.

1.4 Who will be the programme's beneficiaries?

The programme's direct beneficiaries will be organisations involved in elaborating and implementing regional development policies from all the regions of the programme area. The citizens and groups impacted by these policies (e.g., SMEs) will benefit from more effective public intervention as a result. Further information on the direct beneficiaries can be found in *section 3.4.1.*

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1. It is not necessary to be a project partner to use the Platform's services. On the contrary, one of the Platform's aims is to reach out to as many 'regions' as possible.

1.5 What will the programme change?

Individuals and policy-relevant organisations will increase their professional capacities by participating in Interreg Europe activities. As a result, they will be able to improve the design and delivery of their policies. Institutions at local, regional or national level will be more effective at implementing their regional development policies and programmes.

1.6 What is new in the programme?

EU support to interregional cooperation started around 30 years ago. For the 2021-2027 period, Interreg Europe has a few new features which incorporate lessons learnt from the past programme and which will ensure an optimal use of resources:

1. **A single overarching priority,** dedicated to capacity building to better reflect the core nature of the programme.

2. **An enlarged scope**. By focussing on the overarching priority of capacity building, regions will be able to exchange experience on a wide range of regional development issues.

3. **A 'lighter' focus on Structural funds programmes[1].** Compared to the 2014-2020 period, the requirement for projects to address programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal drops from 50% of instruments addressed, to 'at least one', creating more opportunities for projects to address other regional development policy instruments.

4. **A reinforced result-oriented approach.** The 'two-phase' approach to project implementation has been redesigned. Projects must now achieve their objectives (i.e., improving the policy instruments they address) by the end of the core phase[2], at the latest. Only those regions not achieving a policy improvement by the end of this phase will have to produce an action plan.

5. **A stronger emphasis on learning by doing**. Pilot actions may be undertaken from the start of the project.

Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes

Together with the European territorial cooperation (Interreg), the Investment for jobs and growth is one of the two goals of the EU Cohesion policy. Programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal are supported at regional or national levels in the Member States through the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund. These programmes are defined in the Cohesion Policy legislation 2021 – 2027 (e.g., Article 5(2)(a) of the Common Provision Regulation (EU) 2021/1060)). Further information on the different programmes can also be found for each Member State on the Cohesion open data platform of the European Commission, and a list of bodies responsible for these programmes is available on the Interreg Europe website under the country specific information.

▶
Watch our video

What are Investment for Jobs and Growth programmes ?

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1. See further information on the policy instruments addressed in **section 3.4.4.**

2. See further information on the core phase in **section 3.2.1**

2. General programme information

2.1 Interreg Europe within the Cohesion policy

Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) calls for action by the European Union to strengthen its economic, social and territorial cohesion and to promote its overall harmonious development by reducing disparities in regional development and promoting development in least favoured regions. Interreg programmes contribute to this overall objective by supporting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and by contributing to a balanced and sustainable development of the EU territory.

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) has been part of EU cohesion policy since 1990. Interreg was initially launched as a community initiative in the 1989-1993 generation of regional programmes with the aim of stimulating cooperation between regions across the European Union. Since then, Interreg has continued to develop through five further generations.

In 2007, European Territorial Cooperation became a cohesion policy objective, giving it more visibility, an improved legal basis, and closer links with existing EU thematic strategies. Cooperation was seen as being central to the construction of a common European space, and as a cornerstone of European integration. Interreg demonstrates clear European added value by helping to ensure that borders are not barriers, bringing Europeans closer together, helping to solve common problems, facilitating the sharing of ideas and assets (knowledge, skills, infrastructure, etc.), and encouraging strategic work towards common goals.

The Interreg Europe programme is part of the European Territorial Cooperation goal of EU cohesion policy for the 2021-2027 programming period. It is part of the 'interregional cooperation' strand of Interreg ('strand C'). This strand differs from cross-border and transnational cooperation for the following main reasons:

Programme area

Interreg Europe covers all the 27 EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. Organisations from all these countries, regardless of their location,[1] are eligible to participate in this interregional cooperation programme[2]. In contrast, the eligible area for cross-border cooperation, which brings together border regions, is much more limited. Similarly, though wider than cross-border cooperation, the geographical coverage of transnational cooperation, which seeks to support better integration between 'greater' European regions, also focuses on specific areas within Europe. Examples include the Baltic Sea Region, Central Europedelete comma or Alpine Space programmes.

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1. *Following the unprovoked and unjustified Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact, only the territories under the control of the sovereign Government of Ukraine are eligible under the programme. Regions under Russia's military control will not be eligible.*

2. *See also section 3.4.4.2 which addresses inter alia the geographic dimension of what constitutes a 'Balanced partnership' under Interreg Europe*

Programme rationale and the territorial needs it addresses

Interreg Europe primarily targets local and regional public authorities and focuses on identifying, analysing, disseminating and transferring good practices and policy lessons with a view to improving the design and delivery of regional development policies. In other words, it capitalises on what works.

Interregional cooperation addresses policy needs at the intra-regional level by seeking solutions to those needs from other regions. For example, if a public authority determines that its waste management policy is underperforming, it may decide to change its approach. It can do so through discovering inspiring new approaches in an Interreg Europe project with other authorities in Europe facing similar challenges.

In contrast, cross-border and transnational programmes are designed to address cross-border and transnational issues. Cross-border programmes tackle issues relevant to border regions (e.g., joint tourism offer, cooperation of service providers such as fire services, border crossings). Transnational programmes deal with issues specific to larger areas, depending, for instance, on their geographical or historic characteristics (e.g., economic transformation process, improving transport connections, the blue economy, the energy transition or river management).

Capitalisation

Interreg Europe defines capitalisation as the process of collecting, analysing, exchanging experience, and transferring / adapting good practices gained in a specific field of regional development policy. The aim is to increase the professional capacities of the people and organisations involved in this process, so they are able to improve their regional development policies (including programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal).

Interreg's interregional cooperation programme focuses on networking, exchanging experience, and transferring good practices, with the aim of finding solutions to shared challenges. In comparison, cross-border and transnational programmes are more 'implementation-oriented'.

In line with the additionality principle, interregional cooperation programmes cannot be used as a substitute for funding from local, regional, or national policies. It is the role of the respective local or regional policy instruments to integrate and implement the lessons learnt from interregional cooperation. Since project results mainly involve integrating the lessons learnt from cooperation into the relevant local, regional, or national policies, they should, by definition, be durable. This 'mainstreaming' will help to address regional needs with the ultimate objective of improving the situation in the region. This is how the durability of results should in principle be ensured in Interreg Europe.

2.2 The programme area and funding

Interreg Europe covers the entire territory of the European Union with its 27 Member States, including their insular and outermost areas, as well as Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. Partners from other countries may participate at their own cost.

The programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The different funds are pooled together and jointly referred to as **Interreg funds**. The total budget for the programme is EUR 394.5 million, with the following allocations:

- EUR 347,6 million to co-finance interregional cooperation projects implemented by EU partners and by partners coming from the 7 EU candidate countries.

- EUR 17.7 million to finance activities carried out by the Policy Learning Platform

- EUR 29.2 million for technical assistance.

Partners from Norway and Switzerland will be co-financed by national funds from their respective countries.

2.3 The programme's objectives and action

As defined in Article 3 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC, Interreg Europe is part of the 'strand C' of Interreg and is dedicated to reinforcing 'the effectiveness of cohesion policy'.

More specifically, the same article defines Interreg Europe's purpose as being to promote 'exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building .... in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices into regional development policies including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes'.

Based on this provision, as well as on the needs and challenges identified in the cooperation programme, the Interreg Europe programme will pursue the following **overall objective**:

> *To improve the implementation of regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, by promoting the exchange of experiences, innovative approaches, and capacity building in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices among regional policy actors.*

Interreg Europe is therefore dedicated to cooperation among regional policy organisations from across Europe. By supporting learning and increasing the capacities of these organisations, the programme will strive to improve the design and delivery of regional development policies.

To reflect this rationale, the structure of the Interreg Europe programme is based on the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance' as the programme's single objective. The selection of a single overarching priority has multiple benefits:

- It reflects the core focus of Interreg Europe on capacity building, which makes the programme unique, in particular compared with cross-border and transnational cooperation.

- It enables the programme to potentially cover any areas of regional development, within the scope of cohesion policy. This flexibility will help it to better address the diversity of the needs across the European territory.

- It simplifies programme implementation and is in line with its expected results in terms of increased capabilities (of the people and organisations involved in regional development policies).

To achieve its overarching priority, the programme will support two complementary strategic actions:

1. **Interregional cooperation projects** undertaken by partnerships of public authorities and other organisations relevant for regional development policy. Projects will support the **exchange of experience and sharing of practices** among regions with the aim of integrating new solutions into regional development policies (including programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal). The policy knowledge and practices that form the basis of the exchange must primarily come from the regions involved in the projects.

2. The '**Policy Learning Platform**' will facilitate continuous or on demand policy learning activities and will capitalise on good practices. It will contribute to strengthening the institutional capacities of regional development policy practitioners across Europe.

2.4 The programme's intervention logic

Both of the present programme's strategic actions involve supporting interregional activities (including joint pilot actions in the case of projects) to foster the exchange of experience and transfer of good practices between individuals and organisations. By participating in these interregional cooperation activities (which can also include the mobilisation of relevant stakeholders in the participating 'regions'), both the **people** and also their **organisations** will discover inspirational policies from counterparts elsewhere, gain new useful knowledge, and increase their professional capacities. This will enable them to implement new measures and **improve** the design and delivery of their own regional development policies.

Due to their different characteristics and objectives, the programme's two strategic actions will contribute, to differing degrees, to the programme's overall objective. The learning process leading to policy improvement and the contribution from the projects and Platform to this process are summarised in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: steps towards the programme's objective

In projects, the intensity of cooperation is high both in terms of timescales (projects run for several years) and

Project intervention scope

Interregional exchange of experience process

leads to

Increase capacity of people (individual learning)

leads to

Increase capacity of organisations (organisational learning)

leads to

Improved policies

Platform intervention scope

Levels of learning

Individual learning refers to the increased professional capacity of the staff members (individuals) of organisations involved in interregional cooperation activities.

Organisational learning builds on individual learning and occurs when the organisation itself has increased its capacity.

in terms of the nature of the activities. The intensity is lower for the Platform, where support for learning is on demand and mainly on a voluntary basis (the Platform does not provide funding). As a capitalisation initiative, the Platform can obviously not go as far as the projects in supporting stakeholders' involvement and more generally the learning at organisational level.

As indicated by the arrows in chart 1 (above), this difference between the projects and the Platform also means that their expectations in terms of achievements are different. While the Platform's activities will primarily lead to increasing the capacity of individuals, project activities go beyond this (everyone involved in projects should see their capacity increase by the end of a cooperation project) and will primarily aim to increase the capacities of organisations, ultimately leading to policy improvements. Consequently, the Platform's contribution to improving policies cannot be compared to that of projects. In projects, a policy improvement can be more directly attributed to the programme's intervention. This is not the case with the Platform services where the contribution to policy improvement is usually indirect. In cases where a policy improvement can be linked to a Platform activity (as a result of a peer review for instance), the steps subsequently necessary to achieving the policy improvement (e.g., further discussion with stakeholders, preparation work with the policy responsible authority and so on) are not supported by the programme.

2.5 The programme's structure

2.5.1 Overview

Based on the programme strategy defined in the Cooperation Programme (available on the programme website), Interreg Europe has been structured around a single overarching 'priority' (or 'specific objective') in the form of the Interreg-specific objective, namely: 'a better cooperation governance'. This approach is further explained in table 1 below.

Table 1 – Interreg Europe policy objective and specific objective

Selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Rationale
Interreg specific objective (ISO) 'a better cooperation governance'	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	There are several justifications for the choice of a single Interreg-specific objective for Interreg Europe: • The focus of the Interreg Europe programme on the exchange of experience and capacity building among regions to improve their capacity to design, manage, and implement their regional development policies fits the definition of the Interreg-specific objective on governance perfectly. • The choice of the Interreg-specific objective is also in line with the type of results expected from the programme, which is increasing the capacities of regional policy practitioners and improving the delivery of regional development policies. • Although it is often under-exploited, interregional cooperation can potentially bring benefits to any field of regional development policy. Where the same need is shared among the regions, policy relevant organisations can learn from each other. The selection of a single overarching priority does justice to the diversity of regional policy challenges across the European territory. • It gives the programme flexibility to adapt to emerging policy developments, within the scope of cohesion policy.

2.5.2 Programme scope

With the programme structured around a single overarching priority, beneficiaries can potentially cooperate on any subjects of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy.

From a thematic perspective, this scope includes the fields defined by the policy and specific objectives presented in Article 5 of the common provisions regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Article 3 of the ERDF regulation (EU) 2021/1058. While the programme has opted for a single overarching priority, its actions are nonetheless organised in according to the different policy and specific objectives in the abovementioned articles. This will allow the activities supported by the programme to be grouped in a coherent way under meaningful thematic headings (see table 2 below). This also means that **projects need to select a specific objective under Policy Objectives 1 – 5 in their application form (see table 2)**.

The programme also recognises the need to concentrate its resources on those policy areas that are the most relevant and most urgent for regions in Europe. For this reason, the programme plans to concentrate the largest share of its budget (80%) on the thematic areas covered by a selection of specific objectives. This concentration is summarised in table 2.

Table 2 – Indicative allocation of programme budget per Policy Objective / Specific Objective

Share of programme budget	Policy objectives	Specific objectives
80%	**1. A smarter Europe**	All specific objectives: (i) Research and Innovation capacities, uptake of advanced technologies (ii) Digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities (iii) Sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments (iv) Skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition & entrepreneurship (v) Digital connectivity
	2. A greener Europe	All specific objectives: (i) Energy efficiency and reduction of greenhouse emissions (ii) Renewable energy (iii) Smart energy systems, grids and storage (iv) Climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention, resilience (v) Access to water and sustainable water management (vi) Circular and resource efficient economy (vii) Protection and preservation of nature and biodiversity, green infrastructures, pollution reduction (viii) Sustainable urban mobility for zero carbon economy
	4. A more social Europe	The following specific objectives: (i) Effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour market, access to quality employment, social economy (v) Equal access to health care, health systems resilience, family-based and community-based care (vi) Culture and tourism for economic development, social inclusion, and social innovation
20%	**3. A more connected Europe**	All specific objectives: (i) Climate resilient, intelligent, secure, sustainable and intermodal TEN-T (ii) Sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent, and intermodal national, regional, and local mobility
	4. A more social Europe	The following specific objectives: (ii) Access to education, training and lifelong learning, distance and on-line education and training (iii) Inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups (iv) Socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants
	5. A Europe closer to Citizens	All specific objectives: (i) Sustainable integrated territorial development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security (urban areas) (ii) Sustainable integrated territorial development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security (other than urban)

The topics subject to concentration reflect the continued importance of the Smarter Europe and Greener Europe policy objectives, which were already at the heart of the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme. This selection also reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in relation to labour market and health care challenges.

The composition of these groups is indicative and may be subject to modification during the programme's lifetime, in line with the internal rules or procedures defined by the monitoring committee.

In addition, in the context of the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance', Interreg Europe can support 'non-thematic' cooperation on challenges related to the purely administrative management of regional development policies (e.g., evaluation and monitoring, state aid, public procurement, territorial tools, financial instruments). These governance related issues are also important to delivering more effective regional development policies although they are not part of the topics subject to concentration.

2.5.3 Further clarifications on programme scope

Potential applicants should also bear in mind the following clarifications on the scope of the programme:

- Projects may propose a cross-cutting approach, where appropriate. However, each project must still contribute to one specific objective / governance issue only and have a **clear focus on a specific regional policy issue**. The cross-cutting approach does not mean that one project can address several specific objectives without a clear and precise focus. Cross-cutting simply means that the topic addressed under one specific objective can also be linked to issues addressed under another. This would, for instance, be the case of a project focusing on innovation in the solar energy sector. Such a project would clearly fit with specific objective 1 (i) on 'research innovation' and it would also contribute to the programme specific objective 2 (ii) on 'renewable energy'. Applicants must also ensure that the overall issue tackled by their project is coherently articulated throughout the application form, not only in the selection of the specific objective but also in the description the different policy instruments.

- Certain specific objectives may overlap (e.g., sustainable mobility is included both under Policy Objectives 2 and 3). To decide under which specific objective a project should be submitted, applicants should identify the **primary objective / need** addressed by the project. A mobility project, for example, may be driven by environmental considerations, with a primary goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It should, in this case, be submitted under specific objective 2 (viii). On the other hand, if the project's primary goal is related to intermodality and transport infrastructure, it should be submitted under specific objective 3 (ii). The nature of the policy instruments addressed and of the partners and stakeholders involved in the project may also indicate the most relevant specific objective (e.g., environmental organisations in the first case; transport authorities in the second).

Innovative character

During the 2014-2020 period, Interreg Europe supported more than 250 projects on a wide range of subjects related to Policy Objectives 1 and 2 (the list of projects and their topics is available on www.interregeurope.eu). Certain subjects were covered extensively during that period. Applicants to the 2021-2027 Interreg Europe programme need to take this previous experience into consideration in order to demonstrate the innovative character of their proposal.

2.6 Programme management

Programme management is ensured by:

- **a monitoring committee**
- **an audit authority (assisted by a group of auditors)**
- **a managing authority**
- **a joint secretariat**
- **points of contact.**

Further information on these bodies can be found in the Interreg Europe cooperation programme.

2.7 EU's horizontal principles

Interreg Europe's action must comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as well as with the horizontal principles of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women, as stipulated in point 6 of the preamble and Article 9 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

For projects, the application form includes a section dedicated to this question. A project can demonstrate a positive contribution to a horizontal principle only when the issue it addresses is clearly linked to this principle (i.e., the fact that the day-to-day implementation will comply with the principles is not enough to demonstrate a positive contribution).

This section also covers the general implications of state aid rules for the programme and supported projects.

2.7.1 Sustainable development

Sustainable development is at the very heart of the European Union's (EU) policy agenda. Every EU initiative aims to improve citizens' lives, contribute to a healthier planet, and build a sustainable future. The EU and its Member States are determined to deliver on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The European Green Deal plays a major role in achieving some of these goals.

The Interreg Europe programme is in line with the EU's strategy on sustainable development. Due to its core focus on capacity building, the actions it supports cannot have a significant negative impact on the environment and are fully compatible with the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle.

The programme's actions must comply with the principle of sustainable development. For projects, this means that all lead partners must demonstrate how their project takes into consideration and contributes to the quality of the environment. Depending on the issue addressed by the project, this contribution may be more or less evident. Demonstrating it will be simple for projects addressing issues under the 'Greener Europe' policy objective. For projects addressing the 'Smarter Europe' policy objective, the contribution may require more in-depth explanation.

By capitalising on the knowledge generated by the projects, the Policy Learning Platform will also contribute to increasing the capacity of both individuals and institutions in sustainable development. The Policy Learning Platform may also organise activities which focus specifically on issues covered by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Interreg Europe's activities are likely to generate substantial travel, with its resulting CO_2 emissions. While physical meetings are an essential aspect of interregional cooperation activities, the programme encourages its **beneficiaries to use sustainable forms of transport wherever possible** (e.g., train instead of plane) or, whenever feasible, to use digital communication methods. The COVID-19 crisis has also led to new ways of working and learning at distance, which projects should use to organise their exchange of experience process as efficiently as possible (see also *section 3.2.4* (Focus on the exchange of experience process).

2.7.2 Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

Interreg Europe addresses equal opportunities and non-discrimination directly by giving projects and the Platform the possibility of focusing on issues covered under the 'more social and inclusive Europe' policy objective. Beyond this, Interreg Europe will implement social inclusion as a horizontal theme, which means it will support equal opportunities and non-discrimination in any relevant cases within the scope of the programme's action.

The programme will strive to promote equal opportunities and prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation at every stage of its implementation and especially in relation to accessing funding. It will consider the needs of the various target groups at risk of such discrimination and in particular the requirement of ensuring accessibility to persons with disabilities enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Specifically, when preparing their applications, all project applicants will be required to set out/explain how their project will comply with, and possibly even strengthen, equal opportunities and non-discrimination. This will be particularly important for projects that do not address such issues directly.

The activities of the Policy Learning Platform may also address regional policy experience and practice in relation to equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

2.7.3 Equality between women and men

Interreg Europe will put into practice the principle of gender equality as a horizontal theme, which means it will support equality between men and women in any relevant cases within the scope of the programme's action following relevant provisions in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The programme will strive to promote equality between women and men and prevent any discrimination based on gender at all stages of its implementation and especially in relation to accessing funding.

Specifically, when preparing their applications, all project applicants will be required to set out/explain how their project will comply with, and possibly even strengthen, gender equality.

The activities and thematic coverage of the Policy Learning Platform may also address regional policy experience and practice in relation to gender equality.

2.7.4 State aid

Interreg Europe's main objective is to improve the effectiveness of regional policies. The programme will therefore primarily support public authorities. A key principle of this support is that project partners exploit the policy knowledge they gather through interregional exchange to improve their policies for the benefit of the whole community rather than just for a selected individual undertaking. Therefore, the types of activities funded by the programme (e.g.: site visits, interregional thematic seminars/ workshops, peer-reviews, staff exchanges) should in principle not distort competition between EU Member States (i.e., there is in principle no direct financing of economic activity). Moreover, the knowledge and experience acquired by the projects will be publicly and freely accessible to everyone through the Platform.

When assessing the application form (see *section 4.3.2* Quality Assessment), the joint secretariat will check that the activities described in the work plan are in line with the programme's objective and therefore that they are in principle not state aid relevant.

Interreg Europe is envisaging the possibility of funding activities which may fall under state aid rules **only in pilot actions.** Any such cases will be handled either under the *de minimis* Regulation or under the General Block Exemption Regulation (see text box below for more information).

Partners planning a pilot action will need to fill in a short self-assessment section in the application form. This will help the Joint Secretariat carry out their own "state aid" assessment and determine whether the pilot's activities are subject to "state aid" or not. The Joint Secretariat will explain the consequences of this assessment to any projects deemed subject to "state aid". Any projects subject to "state aid" will be informed whether they are granted this aid by the programme's managing authority under the **General Block Exemption Regulation – GBER**[1] (based on the French relevant state aid scheme as the Managing Authority is based in France and/or the relevant Norwegian GBER scheme for the Norwegian fund) or under the ***de minimis* Regulation**[2].

In certain pilot actions, there may be cases where third parties receive an advantage from a project partner which they would not receive under normal market conditions (e.g., free training, business support services, etc.). These third parties will be regarded as **indirect state aid** recipients in such a situation. Where third parties gain such an advantage, project partners will bear the responsibility of complying with state aid rules[3] and this compliance will be checked by controllers.

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1. Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended

2. Commission Regulation (EU) No 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid, and any future amendment

3. In case of indirect state aid, partners should also check whether specific national state aid rules apply.

What is State aid and how is it handled in Interreg Europe?

What is state aid?

Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provide the legal basis for the rules on State aid. These articles generally prohibit state aid and define the rules Member States must follow to grant aid in line with EU law.

To determine whether a grant to a project is state aid relevant or not, the following 5 criteria all need to be satisfied:

- The beneficiary is an undertaking, i.e., an entity engaged in an economic activity (regardless of its legal status, which means that even a public entity or a non-profit organisation can be considered as an "undertaking" in the context of state aid rules)

- The grant provides a benefit or advantage to the beneficiary which it would not have received otherwise

- The grant is selective

- The grant distorts or threatens to distort competition

- The grant affects trade between the Member States.

What happens if aid is granted under the GBER?

Article 20 of the GBER (Regulation) allows ETC programmes to grant state aid in the context of ETC projects.

The **maximum** rate of state aid (including public co-financing granted by other public authorities to the project) that can be granted under this article is 80% of the eligible costs.

When granting state aid under article 20 of the GBER, the Programme Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat will:

- notify the project partner in writing of the maximum aid granted under the GBER scheme

- deal with the reporting obligations established in the GBER and in the French relevant GBER scheme

- keep records of all aid granted under article 20 of the GBER for 10 years.

Article 20a of the GBER also allows the granting of limited amounts of aid to undertakings participating in ETC project activities (third parties/target groups). **This article can be used by project partners to grant indirect state aid, in the context of pilot actions.**

To use this article, the amount of aid granted indirectly by a project partner to an undertaking through project pilot activities must not exceed EUR 22,000 per undertaking and per project. Therefore, the partner granting indirect state aid will have to ensure that the amount that can be granted to any individual undertaking, for a given project, is capped at EUR 22,000.

Please note that specific rules regarding VAT apply whenever GBER is used to cover state aid relevant activities. Please see section 6.4.1 for more information.

What happens if aid is granted under the De minimis Regulation?

The De minimis Regulation allows *de minimis* aid to be granted up to a threshold of EUR 300,000 per undertaking and per Member State/Norway over a period of 3 years. As the programme managing authority is in France, *de minimis aid* granted to a partner by the programme would be granted by France.

The Programme Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat will:

*   obtain a self-declaration from the undertaking (project partner) about any other 'de minimis' aid received from France in that year and the previous two years

*   grant de minimis aid only after checking that the *de minimis* threshold will not be exceeded, based in the information provided in the *de minimis* declaration

*   notify the project partner in writing of the maximum aid granted under the De minimis scheme

*   keep records on individual *de minimis* aid for 10 years.

Points to note:

*   If partners receive additional public funding for their project activities (e.g., through national or regional co-financing schemes) other than their own funding to cover part or all their partner contribution, this will also be regarded as state aid or *de minimis aid* and thus taken into consideration in the calculation of the maximum aid rates or thresholds set out in the GBER or De minimis Regulations.

*   The programme cannot support undertakings in difficulty[1], unless authorised under *de minimis* aid or temporary state aid rules established to address exceptional circumstances.

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1. *The notion of "undertaking in difficulty" is defined in article 2 (18) of* <u>Regulation (EU) No 651/2014</u> *in its latest version*

Notes

Key **project features**

B.

PROJECTS

Are you preparing a project application?

→ *Check your project relevance by using online self-assessment tool*

→ *Ask for feedback on your project idea*

→ *Share your project idea, find project partners*

→ *See frequently asked questions about the project funding*

→ *Check out our project development videos and guidance*

Are you implementing a project?

→ *Check out our guidance documents and videos*

Overview of the main recommendations to applicants

Subject		Recommendation	Section of the manual
Partnership	Size	5 to 16 partners from 5 to 8 'regions' (without considering the possible involvement of advisory and discovery partners)	**Section 3.4.4.3**
	Geographical coverage	Broad coverage going beyond transnational cooperation areas No more than one region involved per country	**Section 3.4.4.2**
	Composition	Mix of regions with different levels of development	**Section 3.4.4.2**
	Advisory partner participation	To be justified and in any case, maximum of one per project	**Section 3.4.2.1**
	Discovery partner participation	Maximum of two per project	**Section 3.4.2.1**
	Number of participations of the same organisation in different projects	To be as limited as possible	**Section 3.4.4.1**
Budget	Project total ERDF budget	Between 1 MEUR and 2 MEUR	**Section 3.5.1**
	Total budget for a pilot action	Between 40,000 EUR and 120,000 EUR (per region)	**Section 3.2.1.2**
	External expertise and services cost category	Less than 50% of the total budget	**Section 6.2.4**
	Travel and accommodation cost category	Calculated as a flat rate of 15% of the staff costs (real costs only if justified)	**Section 6.2.3**
	Equipment cost category	Office equipment: maximum budget of 7,000 EUR (per project)	**Section 6.2.5**

Applicants who do not follow these recommendations must provide clear justifications for not doing so in their application form.

3. Project development

3.1 Interregional cooperation projects: main features

3.1.1 What is an interregional cooperation project?

An interregional cooperation project is a project in which organisations from different countries[1] work together on a shared regional policy issue (e.g., the slow uptake of digital technologies by SMEs in a specific sector, difficulty preventing flood disasters in rural areas, insufficient development of renewable energy, disadvantaged groups poorly integrated in the labour market, underperforming integrated territorial strategies). A cooperation project capitalises on the experience gained within participating regions. By exchanging experience, **good practices**, and, when relevant, testing innovative approaches, participating regions work together to identify new solutions to their territorial challenges and to integrate these solutions into their regional development policies.

Good practice

In the context of Interreg Europe, a **good practice** is defined as an initiative related to regional development policy which has proved to be successful in a region and which is of **potential interest to other regions**. 'Proved successful' is when the good practice has already provided tangible and measurable results in achieving a specific objective. Although the Interreg Europe programme primarily refers to good practices, valuable learning also derives from unsuccessful practices. Lessons learnt from unsuccessful experiences can also be taken into consideration in the exchange of experience process. Examples of good practices can be found in the good practice database on the programme website on *www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices.*

The objective of an interregional cooperation project (of its core phase) is to improve - through the exchange of experience - the performance of the regional development **policy instruments** of the participating regions, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, in line with the programme mission set out in Article (3) (3) (a) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

This particular focus on cohesion policy means that, at the application stage, **at least one of the policy instruments addressed in a project must be an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme**.

Provided that this minimum requirement is met and that the other policy instruments are clearly defined in the application form, the final number of Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes addressed in the project does not have any influence on the assessment of applications.

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1. Further information on the minimum geographical coverage can be found in eligibility criterion 5 in **section 4.3.1**.

The policy instruments addressed by a project must be carefully selected and clearly defined at the application stage. In particular, the following elements should be ensured:

- Only one main policy instrument is addressed per participating 'region'.

- The scope of the different instruments is in line with the issue addressed by the project.

- The project addresses existing policy instruments whose time span covers at least the duration of the Interreg Europe projects. Policy instruments under preparation may be addressed only if sufficient details are available on its scope and nature (each policy instrument needs to be described in the application form) and if its policy responsible authority is already confirmed[1].

Policy instrument

A **policy instrument** is a means of public intervention. It refers to any strategy, programme, or law developed by public authorities and implemented to improve a specific territorial situation. In most cases, financial resources are allocated to a policy instrument. However, an instrument can also refer to a strategy or legislative framework with no specific funding (e.g., a Smart Specialisation Strategy) as long as this strategy or legislative framework comply with the above definition (i.e., 'developed by public authorities and implemented to improve a specific territorial situation'). In principle, internal documents of organisations (e.g., mission statements, in-house strategic orientations) does not qualify as policy instruments. In the context of Interreg Europe, operational programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal are 'policy instruments'. Beyond the EU's cohesion policy programmes, local, regional, or national public authorities implement their own policy instruments, which can also be addressed by Interreg Europe projects.

3.1.2 What are the phases of a project?

Project activities are implemented in **two phases** over **four years** (with an additional three months to close the project).[2]

Core phase – 'interregional learning'

The core phase is dedicated to the **exchange of experience** among project partners and to the integration of the lessons learnt from the cooperation activities into the regional development policy instruments addressed by the project.

The core phase lasts **three years**[3]. The experience gained in the previous programming periods shows that three years is a realistic duration for interregional cooperation projects. It gives sufficient time to develop an exchange of experience process for/between practitioners, which can lead to improving the policy instruments addressed by the project.

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1. Only the Partner State can confirm whether an organisation from its territory qualify as a policy responsible authority for the policy instruments addressed in its country.

2. The requirements in terms of projects' duration may be adapted during the programme' implementation. Any modification would be specified in the terms of reference of the call.

3. Follow-up phase activities could start earlier if the core phase activities take less time than expected.

The project's overall objective of improving the policies of the participating regions should ideally be achieved by the end of the core phase. Partner regions that do not achieve policy improvements during the core phase must produce, by the end of this core phase, an action plan for policy improvement.

Action plan

The **action plan** for policy improvement is a document specifying how the lessons learnt from the cooperation work in the core phase will be implemented in a region in order to improve the policy instrument addressed by this region. It provides information on the nature, costs, and timeframe of the action(s) to be implemented, the stakeholders involved, and the way the action(s) derive from the project. Only regions that do not achieve a policy improvement by the end of the core phase need to produce an action plan.

Only one action plan is required per policy instrument, even when the policy instrument is addressed by several partners from the same region.

An action plan template for policy improvement is provided in appendix 1 of the present programme manual. It includes the core features that the action plan needs to describe. The action plan is also incorporated into the progress report template for the core phase's last report. To be validated by the programme, the action plan must be complete (i.e., information provided in all fields of the template) and relevant (i.e., the action(s) envisaged can realistically lead to policy improvement before the follow-up phase ends). Beyond the template provided in the progress report, regions are welcome to produce an independent document (possibly in their national language) if it is useful for dissemination and/or to inform stakeholders.

Follow-up phase – monitoring the effects of the policy improvements

In order to better assess the results of interregional cooperation, the follow-up phase will primarily be dedicated to monitoring the first effects of the policy improvements and monitoring whether additional policy improvements are being or have been achieved. The duration of the follow-up phase is **one year.** This additional year will allow the projects to continue monitoring the results of their cooperation activities while wrapping up the exchange of experience process.

More specifically, partner regions having achieved policy improvements under the core phase must monitor the effect of these improvements in their territories. The partner regions that produce an action plan for policy improvement are required to monitor whether the envisaged improvements are being or have been achieved. Each partner is responsible for implementing and monitoring the progress of their action plan and for reporting to the lead partner. It should be noted that Interreg Europe will support only the costs incurred for the monitoring; **the costs related to the implementation itself of the actions cannot be covered by the project's budget but must be funded from relevant local, regional, or national sources**.

During the follow-up phase, and if relevant, partners can also continue learning and exchanging experience on the activities of this phase (i.e., activities dedicated to monitoring the effects of policy improvements and/or the implementation of action plans).

The activities to be carried out within each phase of the project are detailed further below.

3.2 What activities should take place under each phase?

3.2.1 Core phase – Focus on interregional learning

The main activities during the core phase will relate to the following:

- exchange of experience

- pilot actions (if relevant).

The overall project methodology adopted for this phase (i.e., organisation of the learning process, choice, and interrelation between the activities) needs to be explained in section 'Project approach' of the application form.

3.2.1.1 Exchange of experience: the cornerstone of an interregional cooperation project

The exchange of experience between partners (also called 'interregional learning process') is the main catalyst for generating the expected policy improvement in the participating regions. The typical activities related to this learning process will include **seminars, workshops, site visits, staff exchanges, and peer reviews**. The learning process is based on the identification, analysis, and exchange of policy knowledge and practice from the participating regions in the policy field tackled by the project.

Interregional cooperation projects need to analyse the experiences and/or practices they exchange and disseminate the most useful findings. This dissemination will mainly be achieved by providing input into the programme's online good practice database, which allows the good practices identified on the project's website to be published. Only the good practices reported through this database and validated by the joint secretariat can be counted under the indicator 'number of good practices identified' (see also _section 3.3.2_ Performance framework and indicators). The nature of the practices can be very different depending on the issue addressed by the project (e.g., governance approaches, methodologies, projects, techniques, etc.).

Examples of typical exchange of experience activities:

- **joint thematic surveys / studies / analysis**

- **interregional study visits**

- **interregional thematic seminars / workshops**

- **interregional peer-reviews**

- **interregional staff exchanges**

- **meetings with the stakeholder group (compulsory)**

- **joint pilot actions**

- **participation in the Policy Learning Platform activities**

- **preparation of action plans (compulsory only for regions where no policy improvement is achieved by the end of the core phase).**

Further information on the exchange of experience process can be found in _section 3.2.4_ (Focus on the exchange of experience process).

3.2.1.2 Pilot actions

Although 'traditional' exchange of experience activities should remain the core focus of any Interreg Europe project, these activities may not always be sufficient to improve policies. In justified cases, they can therefore be supplemented with more operational activities based on a 'learning by doing' approach.

A pilot action

A pilot action is an implementation-related activity dedicated to testing a new approach to public intervention. This is usually the transfer of a successful practice from one region to another, but it can also be a new initiative jointly designed by the project. The ultimate objective of a pilot action is that, when it is successful, it is ultimately integrated into the policy instrument addressed and therefore contributes to improving it. Examples of pilot actions can also be found on the programme website (*www.interregeurope.eu*).

A pilot action should be an integral part of the interregional learning process contributing to achieving the project objectives. For this reason, it should be **jointly developed and implemented** by the partnership. According to EC guidance, 'jointly developed' implies the involvement of partners from at least two participating countries. This requirement is obviously met when the same pilot action is tested in several regions. When it is implemented in one region only, the involvement of a partner from another country will still be required. This involvement could for instance be ensured through a coaching role from the donor region to the region testing the pilot action. Moreover, the progress and outcomes of implementing a pilot action need to be shared with all project partners as part of the exchange of experience activities.

Requests for approval to carry out one or more pilot actions can be made at two moments during project:

- **At application stage**

  In the preparation phase of the proposal, the partnership may identify an innovative practice (either from the partner regions or even outside the partnership) with the potential to be integrated and/or supported under the policy instrument(s) addressed, but which needs to be tested before being rolled out. In such a scenario, the project may include, at application stage, one or more pilot actions. This implies however that all features of the pilot action are already known at this stage since a detailed description of its main features and activities are requested in the application form.

  In principle, a pilot action requested at application stage should start as soon as possible to ensure that it can lead to policy improvements before the end of the core phase. This also means that a pilot action initiated at the start of a project must be finalised before the end of the core phase.

- **After the midterm review[1]**

  The identification of an innovative practice which can be tested in one or several partner regions can also happen during the core phase. In this scenario, the project can request a pilot action in the semester following the midterm review meeting (i.e., semester 5 of the core phase). To ensure possible policy improvements, a pilot action approved after midterm should be finalised at the latest six months before the end of the project.

Due to the demanding character of pilot actions, the programme can only authorise **a maximum of one pilot action per region per project.**

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1. Assuming that programme funds remain available

In compliance with the programme eligibility rules (see *section 6* of the present manual), only costs incurred and paid by the partners listed in the application form are eligible. This means that a pilot action cannot consist in transferring the project subsidy to third parties (e.g., through a direct subsidy to an SME). This also means that a voucher scheme is eligible only under the condition that the service provided by the voucher is directly contracted and paid by the Interreg Europe partner. Moreover, any external / third party organisations benefiting from the pilot actions activities must be selected in a fair and transparent way.

To be supported by the programme, pilot actions must comply with the selection criteria defined in *section 4.3.2* (Quality Assessment) of the present manual. In particular, they must fulfil the following conditions:

Policy relevance and durability

If successful, a pilot action should lead to improving the policy instrument tackled in the region(s) where it is carried out. Since a pilot action involves testing a new approach, if it is successful the measures required to ensure its durability must also be made clear.

Interregionality and contribution to the learning process

The interregional character of a pilot action is not only demonstrated through its joint character (i.e., involvement of partners from at least two different countries) but also by the fact that pilot actions need to be clearly linked to the interregional exchange of experience process. The lessons learnt from carrying out a pilot action should therefore be shared within the whole partnership to enrich this exchange of experience.

'Test-oriented' character

The activities of a pilot action must be implementation-oriented. While feasibility studies and/or meetings may be needed to prepare and adapt a pilot action, its core activity should focus on the small-scale testing of a new practice on the ground with the relevant stakeholders. The innovative character of pilot action is that the approach is new for the region where it is implemented. If successful, the pilot should in principle be continued and / or implemented at full scale within the policy instrument addressed.

Additionality

A pilot action must involve additional activities that would not be carried out without the support of the Interreg Europe programme. The region(s) proposing a pilot action should therefore first verify that the pilot action(s) they propose cannot be financed by the policy instruments addressed or by any other local, regional, or national funds.

Regions not carrying out a pilot action at the start of their project may request to do so after the project's midterm review organised before the end of project's second year. The duration of these pilots will be limited to one year since the last semester of the project should be dedicated to monitoring and reporting the pilot actions' results.

Assistance

Two weeks before the midterm review meeting takes place, lead partners will need to provide information on the ideas for possible pilot actions proposed by their partnership. The relevance of these ideas will then be discussed in detail with the programme during the meeting itself. If needed, the JS will also provide further assistance by phone/e-mail.

Application

In the semester following the midterm review (i.e., semester 5 of the core phase), a call for pilot actions will be opened for the projects concerned. This call will last for a short period of time (around four weeks). Interested projects should apply online via the *Portal*.

Selection

Selection is based on a simplified version of the assessment procedure described in *section 4.3* (Selection of projects). The eligibility check verifies whether the following two requirements are met:

  * the request was submitted on time
  * the request is complete

Only eligible requests go through to the quality assessment, which is also simplified. Only the relevant parts of criteria 1, 2, 4 and 5 described in *section 4.3.2* (Quality Assessment) are checked (see the questions related to pilot actions). The quality assessment does not use scores but indicates whether each criterion is fulfilled, partly fulfilled, or not fulfilled. Where one criterion is assessed as 'not fulfilled', a justification is provided, and the proposal is not recommended for approval. At the end of the assessment, pilot action requests are either recommended for approval, recommended for approval under conditions, or not recommended for approval.

Decision

The final decision on pilot action requests is made by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee, based on the results of the assessment. Lead partners will be informed of the decision on their request soon after it has been made. Decisions are expected before the end of semester 5 of the core phase. The pilot action should start as soon as the approval has been officially notified.

The total budget for pilot actions will depend on the nature and duration of the activities to be carried out. Pilot actions planned at the start of the project may last longer than those approved at midterm. In the context of Interreg Europe, the scope of pilot actions must remain 'limited'. Policy testing that may require significant investment or heavy works will not be possible[2]. **Interreg Europe recommends that the total budget of a pilot action per region should be from 50,000 EUR and a maximum of 130,000 EUR**.

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1. The procedure is launched under the condition that programme funds remain available.

2. This means the Interreg Europe pilot actions do not fall under the scope of article 22 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 and Directive 2011/92/EU. This is also reflected in the fact that, under the French legislation, Interreg Europe is exempted from the SEA (Decree No. 2021-1000 of 30 July 2021).

Examples of pilot actions

Example 1:

A project on open innovation policies

Following the extensive experience of region 'A' in involving citizens in their innovation policy, region B would like to develop new measures for open innovation. Since the participation of civil society in innovation processes is relatively new in its region, region 'B' needs to carry out a pilot action to test the reaction of its citizens to these new approaches before deciding to finance it through the ERDF regional operational programme. The pilot action consists of applying new methods for collecting citizens' reactions to the development of new services/ prototypes by local companies. A consultation web-based tool is developed and several workshops are organised with representatives of the four helices (i.e., public authorities, private companies, research institutes, and customers/ citizens). During the pilot, region A acts as a coach and adviser to region B.

Example 2:

A project on local energy policies

Based on the identification and exchange of good practices on energy performance auditing, a joint testing methodology for energy audits is developed by the partnership. Regions 'A' and 'B' would like to apply the same methodology to their public buildings. However, their respective Structural Funds operational programmes do not incorporate a measure able to fund such activities. Before modifying their operational programmes, these regions wish to test the energy audit in one of their public buildings with the aim of demonstrating the added value of integrating such a measure into their mainstream programmes.

3.2.2 Follow up phase – focus on monitoring the effects of the policy improvements

The main activities of the follow-up phase are related to the following:

- **Monitoring results**

- **Exchange of experience on policy improvements (if relevant)**

- **Pilot actions (if relevant).**

3.2.2.1 Monitoring results

The follow-up phase starts when the core phase ends. It lasts one year. It is primarily dedicated to monitoring the first effects of the policy improvements achieved in the core phase and monitoring whether additional policy improvements are being achieved.

For regions having already achieved a policy improvement in their core phase, monitoring activities will involve checking the territorial effects of those improvements. For instance, a region may demonstrate that a new call for proposals was designed within their policy instrument thanks to the lessons learnt within the core phase of the project. Interreg Europe will therefore consider this call to be a policy improvement. Beyond its preparation and launch, the region concerned should then continue to monitor the outcomes of the call in the follow-up phase (even if the call itself is financed by the policy instrument and not by Interreg Europe). These outcomes can be related to: the number of applications received and approved, the amount of funding committed, the number of beneficiaries, the results achieved on the ground by these beneficiaries, etc.

More generally, the follow-up phase also allows partners to report on any new policy improvements deriving from their exchange of experience. Additionally, and importantly, for regions not achieving a policy improvement by the end of the core phase, the follow-up phase will allow them to: monitor to what extent the measures described in their action plans are ultimately implemented on the ground, evaluate the results of these measures and gather evidence of any achievements to be reported to the programme.

Action plans can take various forms depending on the issue tackled by the project and the territorial characteristics of the partner region. Certain measures can contribute to improving policies without additional funding (e.g., no-cost/ low-cost action in the Result Based Accountability approach[1]). And when funding is required to implement measures, it should come from the relevant local, regional, and/ or national funds.

In order to ensure proper monitoring, the whole partnership needs to remain active and all participating regions need to report actively on the progress achieved in their territories. This information is then consolidated in the six-month progress report submitted to the programme.

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1. More information on the Results Based Accountability approach can be found at http://raguide.org

3.2.2.2 Exchange of experience on policy improvements (if relevant)

Due to its particular focus on monitoring results, the follow-up phase has a more 'regional' character. Nevertheless, this phase can also be a source of policy learning and interregional cooperation and remains important for the following reasons:

• Regions can continue to learn from each other, as well as observe and assess the effects of the policy improvements achieved in the core phase together.

• Regions should continue to exchange information and support each other in the implementation of the action plans (where relevant) and in achieving additional policy changes in the follow-up phase. When a policy improvement relates to the transfer of a particular approach developed in one region, the 'importing' region may need the advice of the 'exporting' region on the best way to adapt this approach to its own context.

• The lessons learnt from implementing and/or mainstreaming pilot actions may provide useful policy inspiration to other regions.

The exchange of experience activities organised in the follow-up phase should be clearly in line with the objective of this phase i.e., exchanging on the policy improvements achieved and their effects and/or on the implementation of action plans.

3.2.2.3 Pilot actions

Pilot actions approved at midterm (i.e., pilot actions starting in the third year of the core phase) can continue to be implemented in the first semester of the follow-up phase. The last semester of the follow-up phase should be dedicated, in principle, to monitoring the results of the pilot action i.e., whether it has been 'mainstreamed' in the region's policy instrument and, if possible, whether this mainstreaming has led or is leading to any first results.

Partner(s) implementing a pilot action should share their experience with the other project partners on a continuous basis so that the whole partnership can benefit from the lessons learnt from the pilot action.

3.2.3 Activities relevant to both phases

3.2.3.1 Communication and dissemination

Each project is required to develop a communication strategy. The communication strategy is an integral part of the overall project strategy and the communication activities must contribute to achieving the overall project objective.

Examples of typical communication and dissemination activities

While each project's communication activities will depend on its specific strategy, some examples of typical activities are provided below:

- Ensuring the project's online presence (e.g., website, social media)

- Organising dissemination events (e.g., final conference with presentations of results)

- Disseminating project leaflets, brochures, or newsletters.

Communication activities need to be tailored to the objectives of each project phase. While in the core phase, the communication activities will primarily support the exchange of experience between partners and stakeholders, in the follow-up phase they will focus mainly on disseminating the results achieved and the effects of the policy improvements in the partner regions.

In the follow-up phase, projects are also required to organise a final public dissemination event bringing together executives and policymakers from the regions involved and from other relevant institutions.

Section 7 provides further details on the communication and dissemination activities.

3.2.3.2 Management and coordination

'Management and coordination' refer to the administrative, legal, and financial activities necessary for running an Interreg Europe project. Due to their standardised and repetitive nature, the management and coordination activities do not need to be specifically indicated in the project work plan (Part E of the application form) but project partners should still carefully plan and budget for them.

Examples of typical management and coordination activities:

- Drawing up and signing a project partnership agreement

- Preparing, submitting, and following-up progress reports

- Organising project steering group meetings

- Financial management and control, including contracting external expertise in line with applicable procurement rules, monitoring, reporting, and controlling expenditure incurred and paid.

Strategic level

Each project is required to determine the necessary procedures for decision-making and coordination for its partnership. A steering group must be constituted to monitor the project. When establishing the decision-making processes and monitoring mechanisms projects should ensure that all partners are adequately involved in this work. Ideally, the steering group should be composed of representatives from all the partners and should meet at least twice a year. The tasks of the steering group should include project monitoring and providing guidance on implementation, such as reviewing and approving work plans and reports or agreeing on any changes to the project.

The steering group must also monitor progress towards the achievement of the project's objectives, which is also assessed through the output and result indicators pre-defined at programme level. The strategic monitoring work also includes financial management (e.g., Is the budget being spent in line with plans? Are allocations for each of the budget categories being respected?).

Day-to-day management

In addition to the steering group, other coordination bodies (e.g., task forces, advisory groups) may be established to coordinate the day-to-day running of the project, complete specific tasks or carry out certain activities. Interreg Europe recommends however that the coordination and management procedures remain as transparent and as simple as possible.

In order to ensure the proper implementation of the project, the lead partner[1] needs to set up an efficient and reliable management and coordination system. For this purpose, each project should appoint or sub-contract the following project management positions:

- **a project coordinator**

    The coordinator is responsible for organising the project's work. The coordinator should: be qualified in European project management as well as in the field tackled by the project; act as a driving force in the partnership and mobilise the partners in order to achieve the objectives set out in the application within the specified deadlines; be the key contact person for the joint secretariat.

- **a financial manager**

    The financial manager is responsible for the accounts, financial reporting, the internal handling of Interreg funds and national contributions. The financial manager should: work in close contact with the coordinator, the controller, and the partners in order to ensure the efficient financial management of the project; be familiar with accounting rules, international transactions, EU and national legislation for the management of Interreg funds public procurement and financial control.

- **a communication manager**

    The communication manager is responsible for the proper implementation of the project's communication strategy. They ensure that all partners agree to the strategy, including task allocation and timing, and are responsible for periodically reviewing whether the strategy is reaching its objectives. Whether the role is outsourced to a communication professional or not, the communication manager should be familiar with the basic principles of developing a communication strategy, along with the variety of techniques available to reach different audiences. They work hand in hand with the project coordinator to deliver project results.

All the above post holders must be fluent in English, which is used for all communications with the joint secretariat and other bodies involved in programme management.

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1. See section 3.4.3

3.2.3.3 Activities at programme level

The programme provides approved projects with training and advice. Project managers responsible for coordination, financial management and communication will be invited to participate in a range of events and activities, which are organised regularly at programme level and are designed to help projects to be as efficient as possible in implementing their projects.

Examples of events organised by the programme:
 • lead partner workshops (organised shortly after approvals to brief the lead partners on the programme's main features and requirements) • exchange of experience workshops • workshops on financial management and control • communication workshops.

Approved projects will also be regularly invited to contribute to a certain number of events and activities organised at programme level. These may include:

- Policy Learning Platform activities

- Annual programme events

- How to prepare communication materials.

Participation in these programme activities is important. Applicants should therefore be aware of them when preparing their application and drawing up their budget. Lead partners (or other relevant project partners) are expected to participate in 6 to 10 events at programme level over the lifetime of the project (core phase and follow-up phase). Regarding participation in the activities of the Policy Learning Platform, Interreg Europe recommends an average participation of two participants per project per event.

3.2.4 Focus on the exchange of experience process

Echoing the previous sections, at the heart of Interreg Europe projects is the exchange of experience and the identification, analysis, and transfer of good practices.

There are many ways to organise a successful learning process between partners and there is no 'one size fits all' method. The approach may depend, for instance, on the number of partners involved or on the nature of the subject addressed. Experience gained in previous programmes has shown a variety of methods from 'simple working methods' based on traditional networking activities, such as thematic seminars, study visits, and staff exchanges, to a more sophisticated approach based on tools such as joint analysis, case studies, peer reviews, or joint pilot actions. As either approach can be successful, Interreg Europe does not impose a specific methodology but, based on experience gained in previous programmes, it recommends making the learning process as simple as possible. At the end of the day, it is up to each interregional cooperation project to propose a strategy that is tailored to the needs of the participating regions and which ensures an efficient learning process between the partners and in the stakeholder groups.

The overall project methodology adopted for the exchange of experience (i.e., organisation of the learning process, choice, and interrelation between the activities) needs to be explained in the section 'Project approach' in the application form (including for the follow-up phase if relevant).

The Interreg Europe programme provides recommendations on the following key components of the learning process:

- **Levels of learning**
- **Stakeholder group**
- **Quality of the activities carried out**
- **Integrated approach**
- **Role of experts**
- **Online exchange of experience.**

Levels of learning:

Policy learning, which is the key driver for achieving policy change, needs to occur at different levels.

*Learning at **individual** level*

The first level of learning refers to the individuals who increase their capacity through participation in a project's cooperation activities. This level of learning is the most obvious and the easiest to achieve in projects (while under the Platform, individual learning is considered to be a result in line with the intervention logic described in *section 2.4*). Nevertheless, the increased capacity of a few individuals in a partner organisation is not sufficient to ensure that results (i.e., policy improvements) are achieved in the region.

*Learning at **organisational** level*

The second level is organisational learning. This type of learning occurs when the new knowledge gained by individuals goes on to become embedded in the organisations they are working for. As a result, the organisation itself may be able to better perform its activities or achieve a policy improvement. Projects have different means for ensuring organisational learning. It can be achieved, for example, through internal feedback meetings in which the staff members directly involved in the cooperation activities report back to the relevant colleagues, managers and elected representatives of the organisation. These key interested parties should also be directly involved in the interregional exchange of experience activities when needed.

As the programme's intervention logic shows (see chart 1, *section 2.4*), these levels of learning are necessary steps in achieving policy improvements. Individual and organisational learning occur within the partner organisations that are directly involved in all project activities. Since policymaking usually involves a range of different stakeholders (and not only the policy responsible authority), it is important that individual and organisational learning also occur within the stakeholder organisations, even though their participation in the project is indirect.

When designing the methodology to carry out the interregional exchange of experience, partners should pay particular attention to the multidimensional aspect of the learning process. To maximise a project's impact, the proposed approach and activities should cover the different levels of learning. Learning at the individual level alone is not sufficient. It should also occur in partners and relevant stakeholder organisations. This is the rationale behind requiring partners to establish a **stakeholder group** for each of the policy instruments addressed in a project. Further information on the stakeholder groups is provided in *section 3.4.2* (Types of participation).

The quality and nature of the activities carried out

The exchange of experience activities must be of good quality. This is obviously a pre-condition for an efficient learning process. They need to be properly prepared, implemented, documented, and monitored.

- Preparation: all the information needed to carry out the activities must be made available in advance. Each activity's objectives, methodology, and agenda need to be clear and shared with the participating partners. If needed, partners may also be asked to share their contributions before the activity takes place.

- Implementation: the responsible partner(s) must ensure the proper management of the activity. The quality of a moderator is, for instance, important for the success of a thematic workshop. Issues such as language barriers or intercultural context also need be taken into consideration. Depending on the activities, innovative techniques can be used to ensure interactivity and the involvement of all participants in the exchange of experience.

- Documentation and monitoring: commonly, partners will produce a report summarising the main outcomes. Evaluating each activity (through a simple satisfaction questionnaire) is also important for improving the quality of future activities.

The choice and format of learning activities is also important. For instance, a staff exchange will not achieve the same objective as a thematic workshop. The choice of the right activity at the right stage of the project's lifetime is therefore important and should be carefully thought through during the project preparation phase.

Integrated approach

The good quality of each individual activity is not sufficient to ensure a successful learning process. An integrated approach, in which activities are logically interlinked, is also needed. Successful approaches usually follow a logical path. The standard approach is to start with the analysis of the partners' different situations and the identification of valuable experiences and practices. This valuable experience is then further investigated through activities such as study visits and thematic workshops. Finally, the partners work with their stakeholders on integrating the lessons learnt from the cooperation activities into their policy instruments.

The coherence, continuity, and good interconnection between the activities therefore also contribute to a successful learning process.

Exchange of experience: some illustrative approaches from real cases

Linear approach

"The project ran five professionally organised thematic interregional workshops, each of them with guest speakers and an exchange on practices as well as interactive sessions with partners and policymakers. All the workshops had a clearly goal-oriented working style and involved presentations, panel discussions, in-depth work using a smaller interactive group format (creative sessions, brainstorming sessions, etc.), scenario-building, and mapping exercises. Following each thematic workshop, a report was issued, comprehensively summarising the workshop outcomes, and contextualising these in a wider policy-context."

Combination of networking activities

"The mixture of methods and combination of activities for the exchange of experiences was extremely useful in the project, considering the complexity of the topic, the diversity of partner organisations, and levels of expertise. Thematic seminars were linked to study visits in which guest speakers, policymakers, and community representatives also participated. Study visits focused on good practice case studies within the partnership in order to illustrate the scale of the issue addressed by the project and the variety of solutions offered by the participating regions. Each site visit was supported by thematic expert papers and documentation. Based on the seminars and study visits, seven expert papers were published. In addition, four mentoring partnerships were formed to support the partners with less experience, to guarantee a win-win exchange of experience process and to promote the transfer of relevant good practices."

Exchange of experience based on local case studies

"The project applied a specific methodological approach developed by our advisory partner. The 'Cluster Initiative Performance Model' (CIPM) facilitated and structured the exchange of experience and offered a theoretical background that allowed each partner to better understand the characteristics and potentials of the different cluster models presented. This individual cluster analysis was supported by two reports. A first analysis, available to all partners, was drafted by the case study city (pre-report). During the seminar in this region, a study visit related to the case study was organised, followed by a policy analysis session during which the conclusions were discussed with all partners and relevant key decision-makers. After each event, concrete policy recommendations for the case study were summarised in the event's report."

Use of peer reviews

"In the project, peer reviewing was used as the key method for carrying out the exchange of experience. The central element in the exchange process was the application of a formal peer review methodology. During a series of five peer reviews, multinational teams of regional experts from more experienced partners visited a less experienced host region to review its regional energy strategy. The peer review process consisted of a preparation phase using a questionnaire, a 3-day study visit, during which the visiting experts met with regional energy stakeholders, made relevant site visits, and drafted a review report with recommendations.

Each host region then used the recommendations in the review report to prepare the action plans. The peer review methodology was regarded as very useful by the project partners and facilitated the exchange of experience. Of benefit was also the possibility to adapt expert advice to the specific situation of a region, which also represented an added value to the ordinary exchange process based on seminars, shorter visits, and reports. All the lessons from the previous stages of the project were also exchanged during a mutual learning seminar, to ensure full knowledge transfer between all partners."

Role of experts

There is no obligation to involve experts in the exchange of experience process but external assistance can help to professionalise this process (e.g., by proposing working methods). Specialised input may also be needed to ensure a more in-depth coverage of certain aspects of the topic tackled by the project or to help partners who are less experienced in the joint working process.

Cooperation should however not be driven by external experts. A successful learning process requires a strong and direct commitment from the regions themselves and especially from the policy responsible authorities.

Online exchange of experience

Online formats offer efficient and sustainable ways of exchanging experience. They also minimise the environmental impact and provide opportunities for more regular and flexible exchanges among the regions involved in a project. At the same time, even if projects should integrate these new ways of working into their strategy, in-person exchanges remain essential to achieve the project's objectives.

Chart 2: Overview of project implementation in two phases

year 1	year 2	year 3	year 4

CORE PHASE → FOLLOW-UP PHASE

Midterm review

Plans for policy change (if needed)
(submitted beginning of year 4)

Activities

'Exchange of experience' *(& possible pilot actions)*

Mandatory: dedicated to achieving policy changes → Optional

Reporting policy changes

Monitoring:
• effects of policy changes
• action plans for policy changes

Results

Policy changes
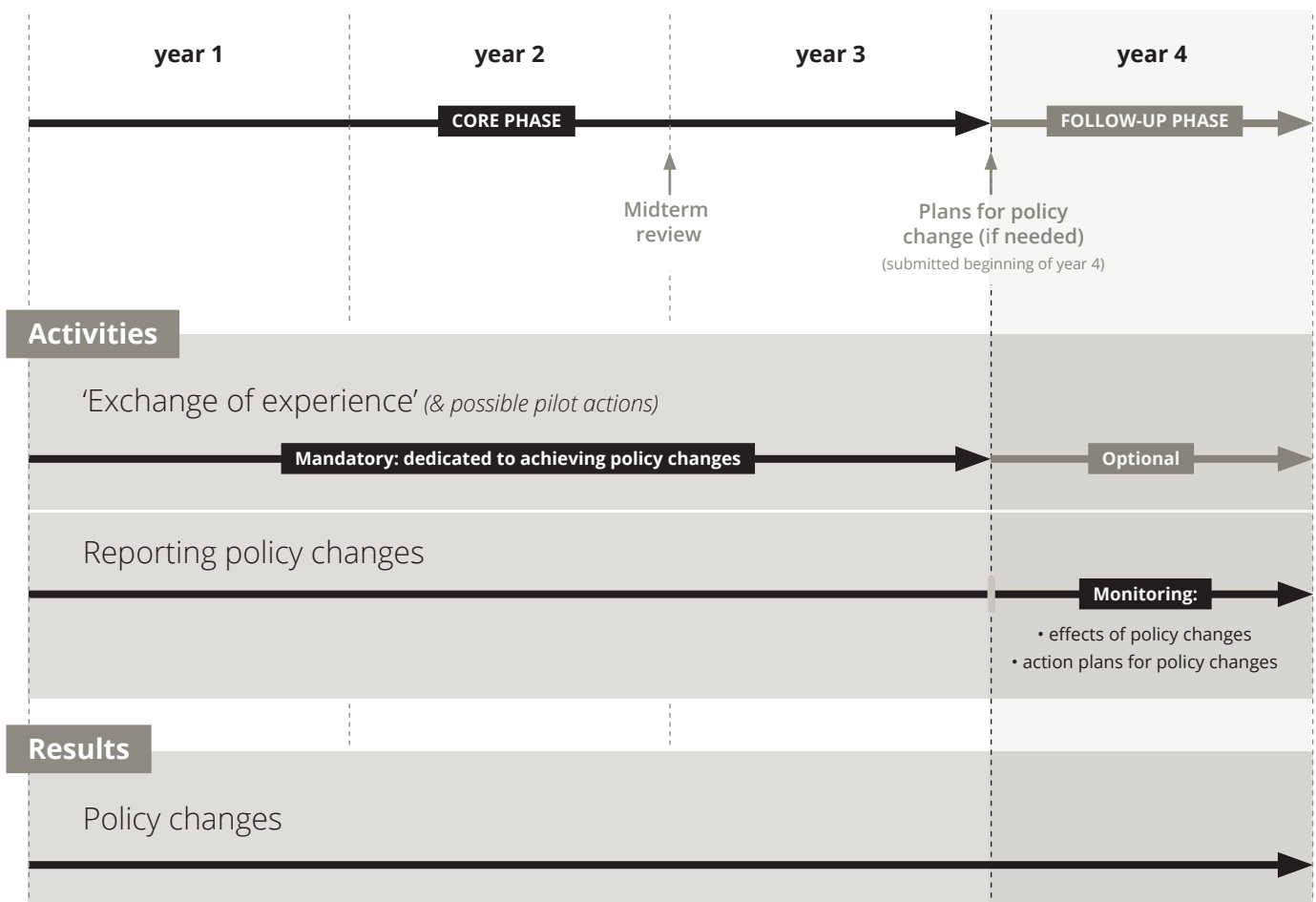
7 steps for greener project activities

'7 steps for greener project activities' were adjusted to the Interreg Europe context based on the document *'7 steps for greener events'* **published by the European Commission.**

Step 1: Consider going online!

Interreg Europe is based on the exchange of experience which implies that some activities will need to take place in person. However, when relevant, online meetings can be considered (i.e., project management meetings).

- Do your participants need to be on-site for all project activities?

- If possible, make sure you also offer online attendance (offer digital participation already in the invitations and on the registration page).

- Put in place reliable videoconferencing.

- Adapt your programme: make it short, engaging, and interactive. Spread out content over several days if need be.

Step 2: Prefer green venues

For example, if you need to book a venue for your final conference, include environmental and sustainable criteria/clauses in your public procurement procedures and selection process to allow you to:

- Select a venue with good public transport links, preferably close to major transport hubs to cut down on shuttle buses and taxis.

- Give priority to hotels certified as environmentally friendly (EU Ecolabel, Green key, EMAS, ISO 14001), close to the venue and with good public transport links.

- Care about energy efficiency and waste sorting: book eco-labelled venues. Find them on the convention websites of the host city. You can also check lists of environmentally friendly accommodations on dedicated websites.[1]

- When possible, use energy-efficient technical equipment.

Step 3: Go for low-carbon travel

- Provide public transport passes with clear directions and timetables.

- If you need local transfers (e.g. for a study visit), use (electric) buses or minibuses.

- Encourage soft mobility such as walking and biking – provide maps to make this easy.

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1. *Page 41 – Climate-Smart Choices: How to Reduce Your Project's Carbon Footprint, ZeroCO2MED EURO-MED Project https://izo.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Interreg-Climate-Smart-Choices-A4.pdf*

Step 4: Refuse - Reduce - Re-use - Recycle

- Think twice before you order signposting and print material.

- If you really need them, order only minimum quantities and use recycled paper if possible.

- Go for sustainable production and delivery. Print materials close to where they will be used to minimise transport.

- Choose a generic design to enable re-use.

- Go paper smart: give preference to spreading the information online.

Step 5: Green the plate

- Choose organic, local, seasonal menus. Consider food with fair trade certificates. Prefer plant-based food for lower carbon footprint.

- Cooperate with local sustainable businesses.

- Adapt quantities to the number of confirmed participants to limit waste. Use online registration to ensure catering for the accurate number of participants.

- Avoid disposable tableware and single-use products. If you really need to, use sustainable materials (e.g.100% certified compostable tableware, linen napkins or paper towels 100% post-consumer recycled fibre).

- Provide tap water or, if necessary, water dispensers.

- Reduce packaging.

- Encourage waste sorting.

- Donate leftovers to charity if possible.

Step 6: Make it beautiful

- Prefer digital signposting.

- If needed, use existing, local, reusable signposting.

Step 7: Spread the word

- Use invitations to make participants aware of your green choices from the beginning.

- Use social media to promote your green actions.

- Ask for feedback and suggestions on sustainability as part of your post-activity evaluation.

3.3. Monitoring project performance

3.3.1 Projects objectives

Capturing the achievements of interregional cooperation projects is important because it helps to demonstrate the added value of interregional cooperation. It is also a challenging since, due to the nature of the programme and its focus on capacity building, the achievements of interregional cooperation are often less tangible. This is also one of the reasons why the follow-up phase has been introduced into the projects.

All projects share the same overall objective, which is to improve the policy instruments they address through the exchange of experience and transfer of practices among the participating regions. **Projects should do their utmost to transform learning into new policy action** (i.e., ensuring that the lessons learnt from the project lead to concrete action in the participating regions, ideally in relation to the policy instrument addressed initially or, if this is not possible, in relation to any other relevant policy instrument). Ideally, and as explained in _section 3.2_ (What activities should take place under each phase), projects should achieve policy improvements at the latest by the end of the core phase.

The consequences of under-performance

Regions not achieving a policy improvement[1] by the end of the core phase must produce an action plan. Not producing an action plan can lead to the recovery of Interreg or Norwegian funds from the region concerned. It also calls into question the participation of this region in the follow-up phase. More generally, **Interreg or Norwegian funds can be recovered from the project/partner in the event of severe under-performance** (e.g., recurring non-participation in project activities, non-delivery of core deliverables, such as identifying good practices).

The follow-up phase allows projects to:
- identify some of the territorial effects of the policy improvements, once the measures inspired by the project have been implemented
- monitor possible additional policy improvements and, if applicable, to what extent the action plan(s) have been implemented.

It is important to note that Interreg Europe cannot finance the implementation of the policy improvements and action plans. The programme is not responsible for their implementation, and it is up to each region to mobilise the resources needed for this. Nonetheless, projects must report on the progress made in implementing these activities to the programme throughout the project and especially in the follow-up phase (via the lead partner through the progress reports). Should implementation prove infeasible, projects will be expected to provide the programme with a detailed explanation.

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1. The conditions to be fulfilled to demonstrate that a policy improvement has been achieved are listed in the definition of indicator RI3 in _section 3.3.2_. An example of checklist used by the programme during the 2014-2020 period to validate results is also provided in the annex of the performance framework (Appendix 2 of the present manual).

3.3.2 Performance framework & indicators

The overall Interreg Europe performance framework is presented in appendix 2. This framework details the programme's monitoring system, which reflects its intervention logic. It incorporates the European Commission's new guidance for the 2021-2027 programming period[1], as well as the Result Based Accountability (RBA) approach[2]. The project monitoring system is based on a limited number of output and result indicators.

Outputs

Outputs are tangible deliverables which contribute to achieving the project's objectives. They are directly related to the activities carried out in the project. Outputs are measured in physical units, such as the number of interregional events, good practices identified, or policies addressed. They do not lead to a qualitative judgement on the project's results (e.g., it is not because a project organises a large number of interregional events (output) that it will necessarily be successful).

Results

Results are the immediate effects of the project's action and derive from the production of its outputs. They are what the project aims to change. Outputs such as the interregional events organised, the good practices identified, or the implementation of pilot actions, are merely means to achieving the objectives of the project. Unlike outputs, results imply a qualitative value or an improvement compared with an initial situation. They are also measured in physical units, such as the number of policy instruments improved.

Impacts

Impacts are the medium or long-term effects of the projects. One of the objectives of the follow-up phase is to identify some of these impacts by monitoring the effects on the ground of the policy improvements (e.g., amount of CO_2 emissions saved, number of jobs created). These effects cannot be directly attributed to Interreg Europe's intervention. Whereas the design of a new initiative and the decision to support it can be a direct achievement of interregional cooperation (in case this initiative was clearly inspired by the Interreg Europe project), the concrete implementation of this initiative (including the mobilisation of funding) is not supported by Interreg Europe. From that perspective, the funds influenced are only an indirect effect of the cooperation. Like outputs and results, impacts are measured in physical units.

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1. More detailed information on the evaluation of the EU cohesion policy can be found on the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/evaluations_en

2. http://raguide.org

In order to monitor the performance of the projects it supports, the programme will use the indicators listed in table 3 (below).

Table 3: Interreg Europe's project indicators

Output indicators	RCO87[1]: Organisations cooperating across borders RCO84: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects OI4[2]: Policy instruments addressed OI5: Interregional policy learning events organised OI6: Good practices identified
Result indicators	RI2[3]: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe
Impact indicator	*II1[4]: Funds influenced*

As shown in chart 3, these output and result indicators are interconnected, in line with the programme's intervention logic.

Chart 3: project intervention logic, from outputs to results
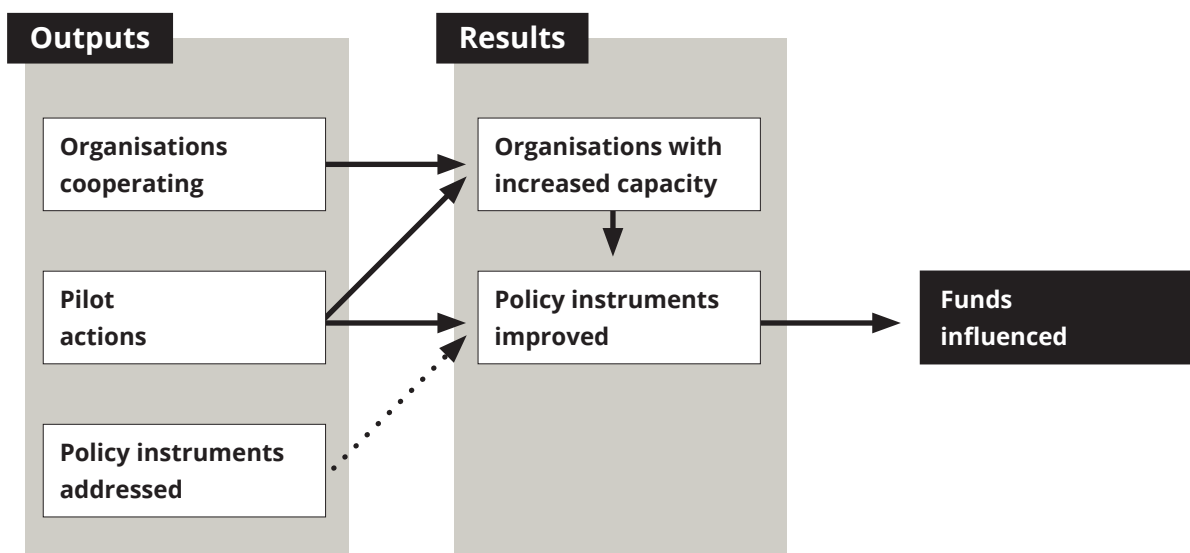
Apart from the impact indicator, all indicators are attributed a **target value** at the application stage. For output indicators this value is calculated automatically based on the data provided in the application form (see also definition below). Target values for the result indicators need to be estimated. In this respect, experience has shown that it is very rare that a project succeeds in improving all the policy instruments it addresses. Nevertheless, since this remains the main objective of any project, applicants may indicate a 100% performance target value for the result indicator RI3 'policy instruments improved (i.e., the target value of this result indicator equals the target value of the corresponding output indicator; OI4 'policy instruments addressed').

Projects must report on all indicators (including the result and impact indicators when possible) throughout the project's lifetime through the progress reports.

Output indicators

RCO87 – Organisations cooperating across borders	
Definition	This indicator measures the number of organisations participating in the interregional cooperation project. In the context of Interreg Europe, the indicator does not only include the project partners, but also includes the associated policy authorities, as well as the stakeholder organisations actively involved in the cooperation activities (e.g., recurring participation in the stakeholder group activities). This active participation needs to be demonstrated in the descriptive part of the progress report. Only actively participating organisations should be considered under this indicator.
Calculation	At the application stage, the target value of this indicator is calculated automatically based on the data provided in the partnership section of the application form. During the project, the value achieved is also calculated automatically based on the data provided in the progress report, including the information on stakeholder involvement.
Intervention logic	This output is directly related to the result indicator 'organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation'.

RCO84 – Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	
Definition	This indicator measures the number of innovative approaches (i.e., pilot actions) tested in a project (if any).
Calculation	At the application stage, the target value of this indicator is calculated automatically based on the data provided in the application form. During the project, the value achieved should be input into the progress report only once any pilot actions have been finalised (i.e., in the last progress report of the core phase for pilot actions included in the application form; within the relevant progress report of the follow-up phase for pilot actions approved at midterm).
Intervention logic	As shown in chart 3, this output is linked to two result indicators. First, pilot actions contribute to 'increasing the capacity of organisations' involved in their implementation and beyond (learning by doing). Second, in Interreg Europe, pilot actions are possible only if they have the potential to 'improve a policy instrument'. A successful pilot action should therefore ideally be continued / mainstreamed within the policy instrument addressed.

OI4 – Policy instruments addressed

Definition	This indicator reflects the total number of policy instruments addressed in a project. These instruments can be Structural Funds programmes (at least one instrument per project must be an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme) or any other regional development instrument relevant to the topic addressed by the project. Even if a specific regional development issue, such as entrepreneurship or public transport is usually tackled by several policy instruments in a region, partners need to identify one main instrument on which to focus their cooperation activities.
Calculation	At the application stage, the target value of this indicator is calculated automatically based on the number of policy instruments described in the application form. At the end of the project, the achieved value is calculated automatically based on the project's final situation (e.g., it may be reduced compared to the target value if a partner region must withdraw without replacement).
Intervention logic	Even if the policy instrument addressed is not an output in the strict definition of the term, it still reflects the scope of the need tackled by the project and is directly linked to the core result indicator 'policy instruments improved'.

OI5 – Interregional policy learning events organised

Definition	This indicator measures the number of interregional events organised by a project during its 4-year lifetime and which are dedicated to the exchange of experience / transfer of practices between partners. The word "event" should be understood in its broad sense since it includes all interregional exchange of experience meetings involving at least two partner regions (e.g., workshops, seminars, study trips, staff exchanges, peer reviews). Back-to-back meetings (e.g., study visit following a seminar organised by the same partner at the same place) should be counted as one event. This indicator does not include: • local / regional events such as stakeholder group meetings • public relations events aimed at disseminating project information and results. The interregional policy learning events include only the interregional meetings. The figure reported in each period should be supported by a description of the activities for that period.
Calculation	At the application stage, the target value of this indicator is calculated automatically based on the data provided in work plan of the application form. Later in the project, the value achieved is also calculated automatically based on the data provided in the activity part of the progress report.
Intervention logic	This output partly reflects the intensity of the learning process and is therefore related to the result indicator 'Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation'.

OI6 – Good practices identified	
Definition	This indicator measures the number of good practices identified and analysed by the project during the exchange of experience process (i.e., during the core phase). Since a project builds on the experience of its participating regions, the good practices identified should come from the partnership area. To qualify as 'good', a practice should demonstrate objective evidence of success and should be recognised as a source of inspiration for the partnership (e.g., practices whose features have led to a policy improvement in another region). This means that only the most valuable practices (and not necessarily all the practices identified within the core phase) should be considered under this indicator. Projects should therefore be reasonable when estimating its target value. One or two good practices per participating region appears a reasonable approach when estimating the target value.
Calculation	At the application stage, the target value of this indicator is calculated automatically based on the data provided in the work plan of the application form. During the project, the achieved value is also automatically calculated based on the data provided in the activity part of the progress report. For reporting purposes, the achieved value should correspond to the number of good practices validated by the joint secretariat and available on the project website through the online good practice tool. The upload of good practices to the project website needs to be completed at the latest by the submission date of the last progress report of the core phase.
Intervention logic	This output refers to the source of inspiration needed for the learning process and is therefore related to the result indicator 'Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation'.

Result indicators

RI2 – Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation	
Definition	This indicator captures the number of organisations whose professional capacity has increased thanks to their participation in the project's activities. The term 'organisations' includes the project partners, the associated policy authorities as well as the stakeholders actively involved in the cooperation activities.
Calculation & reporting	At the application stage, projects need to estimate the target value for this indicator. Projects needs to be reasonable in their estimation. **A 100% performance (i.e., all organisations involved ultimately increase their capacity) is unlikely and therefore not recommended** considering the broad definition of 'organisations' under this indicator and the obligation to provide evidence of the increased capacity. The 'achieved value' for this indicator is reported only once in the project's lifetime, in the final progress report. It is derived from a dedicated survey. The relevant survey template is provided in Appendix 02 'Performance framework'. Through its question 3, the survey also specifies how an organisation can demonstrate that it has increased its capacity thanks to the project. This survey should be launched in the last semester of the project and sent to all organisations actively involved. Only organisations able to convincingly justify their increased capacity (e.g., through using new knowledge, adopting new tools, changing their internal structure) should be counted under this indicator. It is the partners' responsibility to check and validate the answers provided to the survey. The list of organisations with increased capacity should be provided to the programme as evidence for the achieved value reported in the final progress report.
Intervention logic	This result derives from the output indicator 'Organisations cooperating across borders'. In terms of project performance, the indicator is expressed as a percentage by comparing the total number of organisations which ultimately increase their capacity to the total number of organisations involved in the project. As shown in chart 3, increased organisational capacity is a necessary step towards the improvement of regional development policies (i.e., any policy improvement implies that an organisation has first increased its capacity).

RI3 – Policy instruments improved thanks to the projects

Definition	This indicator captures the number of policy improvements generated by the Interreg Europe project. It is therefore related to the core result expected from projects. It refers to monitoring to what extent the policy learning from the cooperation activities is transformed into action and leads to concrete measures in the regions. In principle, a successful pilot action should also result in the improvement of a policy instrument.

Calculation & reporting	A 100% performance (i.e., all policies addressed are finally improved) is automatically indicated in the application form.
	
	As project activities progress, the 'achieved value' is calculated automatically based on the data provided in the 'results' section of the progress reports. This indicator is based on self-declaration by the lead partner and partners. Every single policy improvement reported by projects is therefore systematically and carefully assessed by the programme. Policy improvements are validated only when sufficient evidence is provided that the following conditions are met:
	
	    • the improvement of the instrument has taken place (intention is not enough)
	
	    • the nature of the improvement is clearly specified
	
	    • the improvement can be attributed at least in part to the activities and knowledge generated by the project.
	
	Examples of the check list used to validate results under the 2014-2020 period is provided as an example under Appendix 02 'Performance Framework'.
	
	Lastly, it is worth noting that the programme monitors the number of policy instruments improved and not the number of improvements. This means that, if a region achieves more than one improvement in the same policy instrument, only one improved policy instrument will be counted under the result indicator.

Intervention logic	This result derives directly from the output indicators 'Policy instrument addressed' and 'pilot actions'. It is also related to the other outputs which all contribute to the learning process. In terms of project performance, this indicator is expressed as a percentage by comparing the total number of policy instruments ultimately improved to the total number of policy instruments addressed by the project.

Impact indicator

II1 – Fund influenced	
Definition	This indicator estimates the funds influenced (if any) of the policy improvements achieved as a result of the projects. It refers to the amount (in euros) that is directly influenced by the improvement.
Calculation	No information on this indicator is required at the application stage. During the project, the total achieved value is calculated automatically based on the amount provided in the 'Results' section of the progress reports. The estimation of the funds influenced can be straightforward for the first type of policy improvement related to the implementation of new projects (see next section). In these cases, the amount of **public** funding approved to support the new project (i.e., ERDF budget where the policy instrument is an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme) should be the amount recorded. It can however be much more challenging to estimate 'funds influenced' for other types of improvements. As a general recommendation, a restrictive approach should be adopted by the project and, where there is doubt, no amount should be reported. For type 2 improvements (improved governance), Interreg Europe recommends that no impact on funds should be reported.
Intervention logic	As shown in chart 3, the amount of funds influenced is not directly related to any of the programme's output indicators but derives from the result indicator 'Policy instruments improved'. Indeed, since Interreg Europe does not fund the implementation of the policy improvements, the mobilisation of funds for their realisation cannot be directly attributed to its intervention. This is the reason why the amount of funds influenced is deemed an impact indicator.

3.3.3 Improving policies

Interregional cooperation can influence policy instruments in various ways. Based on the experience gained from previous programmes, policy improvements can be categorised into three main types, which can be interconnected.

Type 1: A new type of project

Interregional cooperation is a source of inspiration that can entirely revamp projects supported by existing policy instruments. This means that, using the lessons learnt from interregional cooperation, a region implements, in its territory, a new type of project financed through one of its existing policy instruments. This type of result is the most common. It implies the availability of funding within the policy instrument addressed. In some case, it is not one but several new projects that are supported through, for instance, the launch of a dedicated call for proposals.

Policy improvements: example of type 1

The good practice developed by region A on promoting innovative tourism (using international electronic marketing) served as a basis for the development of the new project dedicated to the promotion of lake tourism in region B. The idea was to generate additional revenues for the tourism industry by providing new sustainable tourism experiences and services for visiting tourists. The new project was approved in region B for a total budget of EUR 80,000 fully financed through this region's 'Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy' (policy instrument addressed).

Type 2: change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)

Interregional cooperation can also influence the way a policy instrument is managed and implemented. New approaches can be adopted thanks to the lessons learnt from other regions. These improvements may, for instance, be related to:

- a revised methodology for evaluating the performance of the policy instrument

- the introduction of new criteria for selecting the projects supported by the policy instrument

- a more efficient way to publicise/advertise the calls for proposals launched under the policy instrument

- a modification of the decision-making rules or of the composition of the managing committee in charge of implementing the policy instrument.

Policy improvements: example of type 2

Based on the methodology developed in region A, region B improved the evaluation of its funding schemes defined in its Energy Efficiency Development Plan (i.e., a policy instrument is addressed in region B). As a result of interregional cooperation, region B updated and harmonised an ex-post questionnaire for all its regional funding schemes on energy efficiency. This revised approach and indicator system allowed the authority responsible for energy policy to determine whether its initial objectives had been reached in a simpler and more efficient way.

Type 3: A revision of the policy instrument addressed (structural change)

The third type is the most challenging since it requires a change to the policy instrument addressed. It occurs when, based on the lessons learnt from the cooperation project, a region modifies the main features of this instrument. This can, for instance, take the form of adding a new priority or measure. It can also involve modifying the budget allocation between the policy instrument's different priorities.

Policy improvements: example of type 3

Based on the experience gained from different regions involved in the project, Region A has integrated a full paragraph dedicated to 'corporate social responsibility' in the part of its updated Smart Specialisation Strategy dedicated to social innovation.

3.3.4 Innovative character of projects and their results

Projects financed under Interreg Europe need to explain the innovative character of the results they expect to achieve. In Interreg Europe, the concept of 'innovative character' is relative: what is common practice for large public authorities or in a certain European context may be highly innovative for smaller public authorities or in another type of context (and vice versa). This also applies to pilot actions. A pilot action does not need to be the most innovative initiative in Europe, but it must be new in the region that implements it.

Before developing a project idea, applicants should consult the programme website (*http://www.interregeurope.eu*) and browse through the projects already supported by Interreg Europe (in the previous and present programming periods) to check if their topic of interest has already been covered. As far as possible, applicants should ensure that their own idea offers added value compared to past or current initiatives.

Interreg Europe cannot finance the mere continuation of past projects. The question of innovative character is therefore particularly important for partnerships already supported under previous EU programmes and which would like to develop a follow-up proposal. For these partnerships, the innovative character can usually be demonstrated through the following features of the proposal (which can of course be combined):

- the **partnership**: a new partnership is the best way to demonstrate the added value of a proposal. Past projects' partnerships can apply again only if they bring major changes to their composition. Therefore, a new proposal may include only one or two regions from a previous project. This/these region(s) then bring(s) the knowledge and experience gained from the previous project into the new one. In general, the participation of newcomers in interregional cooperation is strongly encourage and the participation of the same organisations in several projects / applications should be avoided (see also section 3.4.4.1 on the multiple involvement).

- the **issue addressed**: a change in the project's topic can be another way to demonstrate the innovative character compared to previous projects.

- However, the change of the topic alone is usually not sufficient to demonstrate the added value of a proposal compared with past projects.

3.3.5 Durability of the project's results

In Interreg Europe, project results are by essence durable since they involve integrating the lessons learnt from the project into the relevant policy instruments of the participating regions.

At the application stage, each participating region needs to explain the type of policy improvement it expects from the project. These envisaged improvements should contribute to solving the issue faced in the region. They must also be realistic and clearly described. This is important for demonstrating the project's capacity to achieve its objective and thereby ensure the durability of its results.

The approach adopted in Interreg Europe is also innovative due to the introduction of a follow-up phase for all projects. For regions that are unsuccessful in the core phase, the follow-up phase gives them more time to achieve policy improvements through the development and hopefully implementation of action plans. For 'regions' achieving a policy improvement during the core phase, the follow-up phase will allow them to monitor its first territorial effects, providing additional evidence of the durability of the project's results.

3.4. Partnership

3.4.1 Eligibility and funding

3.4.1.1 Who is eligible for funding?

The following bodies are eligible to receive Interreg or Norwegian funds and can therefore participate as 'partners' in Interreg Europe projects:

• Public authorities

• Public law bodies (bodies governed by public law)

• Private non-profit bodies.

Public authorities are generally understood to be national, regional, or local authorities.

In order to be considered a **public law body / body governed by public law,** an organisation must comply with Article 2.4 of Directive 2014/24/EU, according to which:

'bodies governed by public law' means bodies that have all the following characteristics:

(a) they are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;

(b) they have legal personality; and

(c) they are financed, for the most part, by the State, regional, or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial, or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional, or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; [...].

In the context of the Interreg Europe programme a **private non-profit body** must comply with the following criteria:

a) *they do not have an industrial or commercial character*

b) *they have a legal personality*

c) *they are not financed, for the most part, by the state, regional, or local authorities, or other bodies governed by public law; or are not subject to management supervision by those bodies; or not having an administrative, managerial, or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional, or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.*

In view of the above criteria, some partner states consider organisations such as cluster organisations, chambers of commerce, business and entrepreneurs' associations or trade unions to be private non-profit bodies. In Interreg Europe projects, private non-profit bodies cannot take on the role of lead partner.

Where necessary, the assessment and confirmation of a partner's legal status can be based on the partner's latest closed annual accounts if there is no other more recent and reliable financial data available.

Each partner state is responsible for confirming the legal status of partners located on its territory. If there is any doubt in this respect, applicants should contact their partner state representative directly. Partner state contact details are available on the programme's website (*www.interregeurope.eu/in-my-country*). Partner states may also reject the participation of a particular project applicant from their territory, for justified reasons, without objecting to the whole project proposal. For instance, this can be the case for public authorities or other organisations breaching the principle of non-discriminatory. If this should occur and the application is approved, the lead partner would be given the opportunity to identify a replacement, ideally from the same country.

3.4.1.2 Co-financing rates

Under the Interreg Europe programme, project activities are co-financed by the Interreg funds at either 70% or 80% depending on the legal status of the project partner. The remaining 30% or 20% must be provided by the partners themselves. Partners' own contributions may come from their own budgets or from other sources. Each partner must make a commitment to provide their own contribution through a declaration.

Partners from Norway are not eligible for Interreg funds but may receive co-financing of up to 50% from pre-allocated national funds, which Norway makes available to support its direct participation in the Interreg Europe programme. The Norwegian national funds are disbursed by the Interreg Europe programme following the submission and approval of project progress reports. Applicants from Norway should contact their national point of contact to get details on the Norwegian funding opportunities.

Type of eligible project partner (legal status and location)	Co-financing rate / Source of funding
Public bodies and bodies governed by public law from 27 EU Member States and the 7 EU candidate countries	**80% Interreg funds**
Private non-profit bodies from the 27 EU Member States and the 7 EU candidate countries	**70% Interreg funds**
Public bodies, bodies governed by public law and private non-profit bodies from Norway	**50% Norwegian fund**
Partners from Switzerland are invited to contact the Swiss Interreg national point of contact for information about Swiss funding opportunities	**Swiss fund**

The 80% and 70% co-financing rates are fixed for the duration of the project. They are based on the legal status of the project partner organisation at the date of either the notification letter accompanying the subsidy contract or of the notification letter submitted with the application form through which the project partner joins the project.

Even if the legal status of a project partner changes from 'public or body governed by public law' to 'private non-profit body' (or vice versa) during the project's lifetime, the co-financing rate will remain the same. Project partners who undergo such a change should, for the reporting period concerned, report their national contribution as being private or public in line with their actual (new) legal status (if the contribution comes from their own sources) or the private or public nature of the co-financing contribution that they receive from an external source.

The programme cannot provide advance payments. Please note that this means that **each project must be able to advance the funds to pay for all its project activities itself until the approval and payment of the six-monthly progress reports.** The programme will reimburse 70% or 80% of the total eligible expenditure declared by each partner in their progress reports, or up to 50% in the case of Norwegian partners. Project partners therefore need to secure sufficient own funding if they want to become involved in an Interreg Europe project.

Interregional cooperation under the Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes

Article 22 (3)(d)(vi) of the Common Provision Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 gives EU Member States and regions the opportunity to finance 'interregional action' through their Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes. EU Member States and regions can therefore develop interregional projects together using funding from their respective programmes. Under this approach, each partner will have a subsidy contract with its own managing authority.

However, an organisation from a region planning interregional action under its national or regional programme may wish to work with organisations from other regions where the authorities have not included such action in their Investment for jobs and growth goal programme. There are two options to deal with this situation:

1   All the organisations from these regions wishing to engage in a wider cooperation project apply to run an Interreg Europe project instead, without funding from their national or regional programmes. This is the simplest and recommended option (e.g., only one subsidy contract is signed between the project's lead partner and the programme).

2   The organisation(s) from the region planning interregional action under their Investment for jobs and growth programme use(s) funds from this programme to participate in the Interreg Europe project, with the other partners funded by Interreg Europe. In this double-funding option, two sources of public funding will need to be managed in the same project.

   The part of the budget financed through the national or regional programme will be listed as 'other funding' in the Interreg Europe application form. Two subsidy contracts will need to be signed: one with Interreg Europe and a second between the partner(s) concerned and the managing authority of the national or regional programme. The deadlines, approval, and reporting procedures of the national or regional programmes may differ from those of Interreg Europe. This second option is therefore more complex to implement. Projects are advised to consider this difficulty when setting up their project.

   This second option is possible only under the following conditions:

   •   The partner funded by the Investment for jobs and growth goal programme cannot be lead partner of the Interreg Europe project. Since the lead partner bears all administrative, financial, and legal responsibility for the implementation of the project (see *section 3.4.3,* The role of the lead partner), it needs to be financed directly by Interreg Europe.

   •   In addition to the partner(s) funded by the national or regional programme, the partnership must involve at least three more partners, two of which must be from EU Member States and financed by the Interreg Europe programme in order to comply with the minimum requirement laid down in the Interreg regulation.

A partner may be financed either under Interreg Europe or under the Investment for jobs and growth programme, but not under both programmes at the same time since expenditure may only be financed by one funding source.

3.4.1.3 Funding for partners from outside the programme area

Partners from countries outside the programme area are welcome to participate in an Interreg Europe project if their participation contributes to its delivery. However, these partners must provide their own funding since they will be ineligible to receive Interreg or Norwegian funds. Like any other partner, their participation and financial contribution must be formalised through a partner declaration. Please note that travel and accommodation costs incurred by these partners can be covered by the other project partners being funded directly by the programme. In this scenario, these costs should be reported under the cost category 'travel and accommodation' of the EU partner concerned.

3.4.2 Types of participation

There are three ways to be involved in projects.

3.4.2.1 Participation as a 'partner'

This is the most direct way for an organisation to be involved in a project. A partner is an organisation that is financially committed to a project (i.e., with a dedicated budget). Only 'partners' are eligible to receive Interreg/ Norwegian funds from the programme[1]. Interreg Europe has no 'sub-partner' category meaning that an organisation not identified in the application form as a partner cannot receive Interreg/Norwegian funds from any of the partners in the project.

Partner (addressing a policy instrument)

In most cases, an organisation is partner in a project to address (and improve) a specific policy instrument.

Advisory partner

Advisory partners may also be involved in projects. Like any partner, they must be included in the 'Partnership' section of the application form and receive funding from Interreg Europe. Advisory partners do not themselves address a policy instrument. They participate in the project in order to offer a particular capability that can help the project achieve its goals. For example, this may be the case of an academic institution specialised in either the topic tackled by the project or in the exchange of experience process.

An 'advisory partner' is different from an 'external expert'. An advisory partner has an interest in the whole project and its policy field. As such, it is involved in all the main activities of the project. In contrast, an external expert will be hired, in compliance with procurement rules, to provide a specific service. The expert does not have an interest in the project as a whole and is usually not involved in all a project's activities. The advisory partner status cannot be used to circumvent public procurement rules.

Since Interreg Europe projects focus on the exchange of experience among organisations that are responsible for their own policy instruments, the participation of advisory partners should remain limited (most interregional cooperation projects are implemented without advisory partners). The participation of these partners should therefore be clearly justified in the application form. **Interreg Europe recommends that a project does not involve more than one advisory partner**.

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1. *On the condition that these partners are located in the programme eligible area and are not already financed through their operational programme under the Investment for jobs and growth goal.*

Discovery partner

Organisations coming from the EU candidate countries should preferably be involved as partners addressing a policy instrument. However, it is also possible for these organisations to be involved in a project as 'discovery' partners. The involvement as discovery partner is lighter since this partner does not address any policy instrument. The discovery partner is involved in the project to get acquainted with the interregional exchange of experience process supported within Interreg Europe. The objective is to increase its capacity on the issue addressed by the project but also on the management of interregional cooperation projects. A discovery partner is expected to participate as much as possible in all the main activities of the project (e.g., in the main interregional policy learning events). The partner's relevance to the issue addressed and expected involvement in the project need to be explained at the application stage. During project implementation, the involvement of the discovery partner(s) is monitored through the regular progress reports. In the final progress report, the project should summarise the possible benefits gained from this participation. The programme recommends a maximum of two discovery partners per project.

Lead partner

In each project, one of the partners must be appointed to act as lead partner. The lead partner is the formal link between the project and the managing authority/joint secretariat (in accordance with Article 26 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059). The lead partner takes on the responsibility for management, communication, implementation, and coordination of the project activities undertaken by the partners involved. An advisory partner can be a lead partner. Further details can be found in *section 3.4.3* (The role of the lead partner).

3.4.2.2 Participation as 'associated policy authority'

As explained in *section 3.4.4.1* (Coherence of the partnership), the participation of the authorities responsible for the policy instruments addressed by a project is mandatory. The obligation is covered under the eligibility criterion 7 'Participation of policy responsible authorities[1] (further details in *section 4.3.1*). When preparing an application, it is therefore essential to identify the relevant 'policy responsible authority' of each policy instrument addressed by the project. In case of doubt, the relevant Partner State should be contacted since only the Partner State can confirm whether an organisation from its territory qualify as a policy responsible authority for the policy instruments addressed in its country.

When the **policy responsible authority** is unable to participate as a partner, and another organisation from the region is involved as a partner, the former authority must still be involved as an 'associated policy authority"[2].

An 'associated policy authority' has the following characteristics:

- Although it is not a 'partner' as defined above, it must be included in the 'partnership' section of the application form, where its core features must be described (e.g., name of the institution, address, contact person).

- It must sign a declaration confirming its commitment to the project

- It does not receive funding, but its travel and accommodation costs may be paid by the main partner (and reported as external expertise costs). It is a member of the stakeholder group created in each region (see next paragraph).

- Its involvement is regularly monitored during the project through a dedicated section in the progress report.

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1. The definition of 'policy responsible authority' is provided in *section 3.4.4.1*.

2. Like stakeholders, associated policy authorities are not considered to be 'partners' in the sense of Article 23 (1) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059. They are not committed to staffing or financing the project.

3.4.2.3 Participation as 'stakeholder'

The third possibility to participate in a project is to join as a stakeholder.

Even if the policy responsible authorities are at the heart of the policy making process, they usually work closely with other organisations with a stake in the policy issue addressed. For instance, in 'research and innovation' policies, the policy responsible authority works closely with organisations such as innovation agencies, chambers of commerce, research institutes, as well as with the private sector. Some of these organisations may even implement part of the regional development policy.

To reflect this 'ecosystem' in a project, a stakeholder group must be created for each of the policy instruments addressed by the project[1]. This group should be constituted of organisations from the 'region' with a stake in the policy issue addressed. By actively involving these organisations in the cooperation work, the project should also contribute to increasing their capacity. This involvement will be a determining factor in maximising the chances that policy improvements will be achieved by the end of the core phase. It is the responsibility of the partners listed in the application form to set up and coordinate their stakeholder group.

The stakeholder organisations are different from the partner organisations, and they do not receive funding from the programme. However, the travel and accommodation costs incurred by stakeholder group members for participating in project activities are eligible if they are paid for by the partners who are directly funded by the programme. These costs need to be budgeted and reported under external expertise costs (see also *section 6.2.4* External expertise and services).

As explained in *section 3.4.4.1* (Coherence of the partnership), and beyond the participation of the policy responsible authority, any other organisation whose involvement is essential in light of the issue addressed by the project should participate as a partner rather than as a stakeholder (if eligible).

The stakeholder group is also an opportunity to involve organisations which, although not eligible for Interreg Europe (e.g., those from the private 'for profit' sector), are still important for the development of the policy.

The envisaged stakeholder group members need to be identified at the application stage. Associated policy authorities will automatically be members of the stakeholder groups. Throughout a project's lifetime, partners must report on the involvement of the different organisations. This is important as it enables the programme to monitor indicators related to organisational learning (i.e., RCO87 and RI1 as defined in *section 3.3.2* Performance framework & indicators).

It is the responsibility of each project to define the best way to involve the relevant stakeholders in the learning process. The approach may be different depending on a project's features (e.g., topic addressed, specific objective to the achieved, nature of the organisation concerned, territorial level tackled). For instance, the importance of having the 'associated policy authorities' involved in the project may require dedicated measures to keep them committed.

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1. *For projects focusing on governance related issues, the scope of the stakeholder groups may be more limited.*

For example:

- Organising regular stakeholder group meetings in order to:

    - share the lessons learnt from the interregional cooperation activities with the stakeholders

    - allow stakeholders to input their opinions and ideas into the project.

- When relevant (e.g., associated policy authority), having relevant stakeholders participate in the interregional policy meetings organised by the project

- Creating a virtual space (e.g., mailing list, discussion forum, etc.) to facilitate the exchange of information relating to the project among stakeholders.

The URBACT programme has also worked on stakeholder engagement and some of the materials available on its website may be of relevance to Interreg Europe projects (*https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home/engaging-stakeholders*).

3.4.3 The role of the lead partner

Each project must follow the 'lead partner principle'. This means that one of the partners in the partnership assumes the role of lead partner and with this the overall responsibility for the project vis-à-vis the managing authority and joint secretariat (in accordance with Article 26 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059).

The lead partner:

- submits the application form on behalf of the partnership

- signs a subsidy contract (see *section 5.1.3* Subsidy contract) with the managing authority for the total amount of the subsidy

- is responsible for the division of tasks among the partners involved in the project and ensures that these tasks are fulfilled in compliance with the application form and subsidy contract

- lays down the arrangements for its relationship with its partners in a project partnership agreement (see *section 5.1.4* Project partnership agreement)

- ensures an efficient internal management and control system

- ensures that the project reports on time and correctly to the joint secretariat

- ensures that the expenditure reported by all partners is linked to the project, corresponds to the activities agreed upon by all the partners, and is in accordance with the subsidy contract

- requests and receives payments of programme funding

- transfers programme funding to the partners within the timeframe agreed in the partnership agreement in compliance with the amounts stated in the progress report.

The lead partner can be from an EU Member State, one of the 7 EU candidate countries or Norway. Private non-profit bodies, discovery partners and partners from Switzerland cannot assume the role of lead partner.

Who can be lead partner?	
Status and location of partners	**Can be lead partner?**
Public body or body governed by public law (including advisory partner but excluding discovery partner) from all Partner States except Switzerland	Yes*
Public body or body governed by public law from Switzerland	No
Private non-profit body from all Partner States	No

*The legal status requirement to be lead partner must be fulfilled at the time of signature of the subsidy contract. If the lead partner organisation changes its legal status during the lifetime of the project and becomes a private non-profit body, its role as lead partner will remain unaffected **unless this change of legal status risks endangering its operational or financial capacity to assume the lead partner role.**

3.4.4 Quality of partnership

3.4.4.1 Coherence of the partnership

Involvement of the policy responsible authorities

In line with the programme's overall objective, the **policy responsible authorities are** Interreg Europe's **core target group**. These organisations can be national, regional, local public authorities and other relevant bodies responsible for elaborating and/or implementing regional development policies.

Watch our video

What are policy responsible authorities?

A policy responsible authority
A **policy responsible authority** is the organisation in charge of elaborating and/or implementing a specific policy instrument. The concept 'policy responsible authority' is not related to the legal status of the organisation. In most cases the policy responsible authority is a public body (i.e., local, regional, or national authority). For instance, the policy responsible authority for a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan is the city itself. However, other organisations, such as bodies governed by public law, may also be considered policy responsible authorities, if they have an official role in the elaboration and/or implementation of the policy instrument addressed. In the case of Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, the policy responsible authorities are the relevant managing authorities or intermediate bodies. Only the Partner State can confirm whether an organisation from its country is policy responsible authority for a specific policy instrument.

The experience of previous programming periods shows that the direct involvement of these authorities is key to projects achieving their objectives. The 2014-2020 evaluation revealed that most of the results achieved by projects (approximately 60%) could be attributed to the programme's intervention only indirectly (because the policy responsible authority was not involved as partner). The evaluation concluded that the participation of the policy responsible authorities as partners should be obligatory.

Therefore, **the involvement of the policy responsible authority as partner is compulsory for at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in a project application. For any instruments where this is not the case, the relevant policy responsible authorities must be involved as 'associated policy authorities'** (see the concept of 'associated policy authority' in *section 3.4.2.2* Participation as associated policy authority).

All the other partners who are not policy responsible authorities should explain their **policy relevance,** meaning their role in the policymaking in relation to the policy instrument addressed. In particular, the partner's role in the development and/or delivery of the policy instrument should be clarified and explained in the 'Policy instrument' section of the application form.

Territorial context and policy instruments addressed

Selecting the relevant regions and partners is also an obvious key success factor for projects. The proposed partnership must be consistent with the overall issue tackled by the project. This consistency is ensured by the following:

- The partners, associated policy authorities, and stakeholders are competent in the issue addressed by the project.

- The participating regions[1] are experienced in the issue addressed (even if the level of experience can vary significantly from region to region) since these regions are the source of experience and knowledge to be exchanged within the project. Each partner must demonstrate its capacity to contribute to and benefit from the project.

- The issue addressed by the project reflects a need shared by all participating regions, i.e., all regions face a similar issue and need to be more performant in solving this issue. This also means that, if the issue has a specific territorial characteristic (e.g., access to broadband in mountain regions), this characteristic should obviously be present in all the regions involved in the project.

- The issue addressed by the project is addressed in the different policy instruments targeted by partners.

The section of the application form dedicated to the policy instruments and territorial context is essential for explaining the rationale behind the proposed partnership. The information provided in this section needs to be as specific and detailed as possible. In particular, the territorial context should provide information on the overall state of play of the field addressed by the project in each participating region. It should contribute to demonstrating that the different partner regions share a common need.

Each participating region must focus on one main policy instrument (even if a regional development issue can often be addressed through several policy instruments). As specified in *section 3.1.1* of the present manual (What is an interregional cooperation project?) and in line with Article (3) (3) (a) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, **at least one of the policy instruments addressed by the project must be an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme**.

A policy instrument can be addressed be several partners from the same region. Indeed, beyond the participation of the policy responsible authority, **the programme welcomes the participation, as partners, of the organisation(s) that are most relevant for the issue addressed by the project**. For projects whose focus is quite specialised, the policy responsible authority often needs the experience / knowledge of a more specialised body in the region. This body should then preferably be involved as a partner (if it is eligible). Where a pilot action is proposed, the involvement of another organisation from the region as partner may also be necessary.

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1. *Obviously, the level of experience can be very different according to the partners*

Involvement in multiple projects

While there is no limit to the number of projects an organisation can be involved in, **Interreg Europe recommends that the number is kept low for the following reasons**:

- First and foremost, participating in an interregional cooperation project is demanding. The participation of the same organisation in several projects may not always be realistic. Applicants should select the projects that best fit their needs and territorial context. In particular, the participation of small organisations in numerous applications can call into question their seriousness and credibility. Based on previous experience, multiple involvement may also reflect an artificial partnership. Approval in such cases also increases the risk of double funding. Of course, large public organisations with many departments, or organisations from smaller countries where the number of eligible partners is more limited, may be able to justify their participation in multiple applications.

- The total budget available for projects is limited due to the programme's wide geographical scope and the high number of regions in Europe. Past experience has shown that there is a risk of too often supporting the same beneficiaries addressing similar issues, whereas it is important for the quality of the programme that the pool of experience and practices exchanged is as wide and varied as possible.

The involvement of the same organisation in different applications/projects needs to be justified in the dedicated field of the application form (under the section 'Main policy instruments addressed').

3.4.4.2 Balanced partnership

A partnership is considered 'balanced' when it has the following characteristics:

- **Proportionate involvement of the partners**

- **Mix of regions with different levels of development**

- **Geographical coverage**

Proportionate involvement of the partners

A 'balanced' partnership exists when all partners are involved in a similar way in the cooperation project. This means that all partners should in principle participate in all core project activities and be involved in the project's decisions. If this is not the case, justification should be provided in the application form. Ideally, the financial arrangements should also reflect this balanced participation. Any major differences between partners' budgets must be justified in the application form. A partner's budget must of course consider the level of costs in its specific country and its level of responsibility in the project (i.e., the budget of the lead partner is usually higher than that of the other partners).

Mix of regions with different levels of development

Through its pan-European scope, Interreg Europe contributes to putting Cohesion policy and its principle of solidarity into practice. With this in mind, Interreg Europe strongly recommends that project partnerships include **a mix of regions with different levels of development** as this allows less developed regions to access the knowledge and experience of more advanced regions. Similarly, more advanced regions can learn

from each other within the same project, but can sometimes even find inspiration in less advanced regions. For these reasons, applications involving a mix of more and less developed regions will be assessed favourably in the selection process.

Levels of development are defined in Article 108 (2) of the CPR Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. Specifically, the programme's aim is to encourage regions with a GDP per capita lower than 75% of the EU-27 average (less developed regions) to work with regions whose GDP per capita is higher (either with transition regions – whose GDP per capita is between 75% and 100% of the average GDP per capita of the EU-27 and/or with more developed regions, whose GDP per capita is above 100 % of the average GDP per capita of the EU-27).

Geographical coverage

Interreg Europe covers the 27 EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. This allows partners to broaden their experience and to compare their practices with those in very different cultures and contexts. Partnerships should therefore go beyond cross-border and transnational cooperation areas[1] and more generally go beyond areas formed by a group of geographically proximate countries. The balanced geographical coverage should also be reflected in a project's financial arrangements. The budget allocation should in principle be balanced between countries, including between a group of geographically close countries and the other countries represented. Interreg Europe does not consider partnerships that are in essence mainly 'transnational' (e.g., most of the partners come from a transnational cooperation area with only a few other 'external' partners involved in the project) as offering added value. In the same spirit, the added value of involving several regions from the same country in a project should be explained in the application form.

The importance of the geographical coverage is reflected in the selection criterion 'Quality of partnership' (see *section 4.3.2* Quality assessment) and in the definition of the eliminatory score. Indeed, partnerships in which at least 80% of the partners come from the same cross border or transnational cooperation area, or in which at least 80% of the funding is allocated to the same cross border or transnational cooperation area, will be scored 'eliminated' under criterion 3 of the strategic assessment ('Quality of partnership'). They will therefore not benefit from a full assessment.

Despite these measures, which existed under previous programming periods, the poor geographical coverage has been one of the most common weaknesses in the applications submitted to the programme. Therefore, the **need to ensure a minimum geographical coverage is now explicit in a dedicated eligibility criterion** (see criterion 5 under *section 4.3.1* Eligibility assessment). However, the **fulfilment of eligibility criterion 5 is not sufficient to ensure that a partnership goes beyond transnational cooperation areas**[2]. For instance, a transnational programme like MED already covers four of the five geographical areas defined by Interreg Europe ('South', 'East', with Slovenia and Bulgaria, 'West' with part of France and 'Candidate countries area' with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia).

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1. Cross-border and transnational cooperation areas can be found on DG Regional and Urban Policy website: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/trans-national/ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/#4

2. The geographical coverage is also tackled in *section 4.3.2* (quality assessment) in the definition of the eliminatory score and the description of criterion

3 'Quality of partnership'.

3.4.4.3 Size of the partnership

In compliance with Article 23 (1) of the ETC regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Interreg Europe projects must involve "*partners from at least three participating countries, at least two of which shall be beneficiaries from EU Member States*", with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding[1]. In addition, the programme introduces a further eligibility criterion, specifically, a minimum geographical coverage for all project applications[2] (see criterion 5, *section 4.3.1* Eligibility assessment).

Based on previous experience, a partnership of between **5 to 8 'regions'** appears to be the configuration which best ensures a rich and successful interregional learning process. The recommended number of partners per project (without considering the possible involvement of advisory and discovery partners) is therefore from minimum **5 up to 16 partners**[3] when the following points are also considered:

- the participation of the policy responsible authorities as partners is compulsory for at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in a project application

- the most relevant organisation(s) for the issue addressed by the project are also encouraged to be involved as partners.

The complexity of managing a large partnership must not be underestimated. Large partnerships should preferably be proposed by lead partners who have sufficient experience in managing interregional cooperation projects.

EGTCs participation in Interreg Europe projects

Eligibility and relevance

According to article 1 of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 (as modified by article 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013), the objective of EGTCs is to "facilitate and promote, in particular, territorial cooperation, including one or more of the cross border, transnational and interregional strands of cooperation, between its members…. with the aim of strengthening Union economic, social, and territorial cohesion". On this basis, EGTCs are eligible to Interreg Europe funding.

Due to their specific scope of action (i.e., usually going beyond traditional local or regional policies), EGTCs should ensure that their role in the cooperation is consistent with the projects' overall objective. If an EGTC does not join as an advisory partner, its relevance to the policy instruments it addresses must be clearly demonstrated.

EGTCs and partnership requirements

According to Article 23 (6) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, an EGTC may be the sole partner in an interregional cooperation project provided that its members are from at least three participating countries. However, this configuration is unlikely to arise in practice considering the partnership requirements set for Interreg Europe projects. In particular, the participation as sole partner may not be compatible with the following eligibility criteria as defined in *section 4.3.1* (Eligibility assessment) of the present manual: wide geographical coverage (criterion 5), minimum focus on Investment for jobs and growth goal programme (criterion 6) and the involvement of the policy responsible authority (criterion 7).

Control of EGTC expenditure

The expenditure incurred by an EGTC will be verified in line with the control system applicable in the EU Member State where the EGTC is registered. Special control mechanisms may apply if the EGTC, registered in one EU Member State, incurs expenditure that is verifiable only on the territory of another EU Member State (see also footnote 43 in *section 6.7.1* (designation of the controller)).

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1. *This latter specification is required due to the possibility for organisations to use funds from their Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes to*

be involved in an Interreg Europe project (see section 3.4.1.2 of the programme manual).

2. *This minimum geographical coverage does not apply to application where more than one outermost region is involved.*

3. *Associated policy authorities and stakeholder organisations are not 'partners'*

3.5 Drawing up a project budget

3.5.1 General principles

The overall budget must be proportionate to the activities planned and the number of partners involved.

Planning the budget can only start after the partnership has a clear view of:

- the activities and outputs planned per semester
- the responsibilities of each partner, i.e., who will be responsible for which activity / output.

To plan the budget, the partnership should identify:

- the resources needed by each partner to complete the activities
- the estimated related costs and when they will be paid
- the estimated costs under the relevant cost category (see table below). For detailed information on the different cost categories, please study *section 6.2* (Cost categories) of this programme manual carefully).

Based on the experience of previous programmes, it is recommended that the **project's total Interreg funds budget ranges from a minimum of 1 MEUR up to a maximum of 2 MEUR**.

It is important that all partners are involved in the preparatory work and related meetings during the project application's development phase. Experience shows that time invested prior to the submission of the application leads to stronger partnerships with clear responsibilities and well justified budget allocations.

Table 4: overview of cost categories

Cost category	Recommendations
Staff	Usually, the largest share of the total budget Applies to the **staff employed** by the project partners
Office and administrative	Calculated as a flat rate of 15% of the staff costs Is **calculated automatically** in the application form
Travel and accommodation	Flat rate of 15% of staff costs (real costs only if justified)
External expertise and services	Less than 50% of the total budget (recommended) Applies to **services and expertise** provided by an **organisation other than the project partners** (including travel costs for staff of the associated policy authorities and stakeholders).
Equipment	Office equipment (usually not exceeding EUR 7,000 per project - recommended) and other equipment (where pilot actions are planned, if justified)
Infrastructure and works	**Only in the case of pilot actions**, and if justified by the nature of this action

3.5.2 The spending plan and budget decommitment

In the application form, each project needs to set out their overall spending plan broken down for each of the reporting periods, taking the following into consideration:

- The reporting periods cover periods of six months, except for the last reporting period, which covers the last nine months (six months of project activities plus three additional months dedicated to the project's administrative closure).

- The spending plan should be an estimation of the **actual payments** to be made in each of the reporting periods. Therefore, it only partly reflects the activities taking place in a certain period. For example, if an activity is carried out close to the end of a reporting period, the related payment may only be possible in the following period and the costs should therefore be budgeted in the following reporting period.

The project's spending plan is important because projects will be monitored based on their spending plan throughout their lifetime. If a project does not respect its spending plan, a budget reduction proportional to the underspending encountered may be applied following the midterm review meeting (for more information, see _section 5.2.3_ (Monitoring a project's progress and midterm review).[1]

It is therefore important that projects:

- **carefully prepare a realistic spending plan (spending usually increases over the semesters)**

- **are ready to start implementing their project very quickly after project approval**

- **monitor spending continuously during implementation**

- **ensure regular, timely, and full reporting.**

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1. _The project spending plan is important for the programme because the programme must also comply with its own spending plan. The programme's spending plan is based on Interreg funds allocations by the Commission. At the beginning of every year, the Commission allocates a certain amount of Interreg funds to the Interreg Europe programme. The annual allocation must be spent within 3 years following the year of commitment. If, at the end of 3 years, the annual allocation has not been spent, the corresponding Interreg funds budget will be lost (= decommitted). If this loss results from certain projects underspending compared to their spending target, the programme will be obliged to reduce the budgets of these projects. The first year of potential decommitment for the Interreg Europe programme is 2025._

4. Application and selection

4.1 Assistance to applicants

To help projects to develop their ideas, the programme will provide the following assistance to future applicants:

- **A project idea and partner search database.** This is available on the programme's website _www. interregeurope.eu_. Anyone wishing to publish their project idea and pitch it to potential partners are welcome to do so via the website's dashboard where it will reach every Interreg Europe community member. Organisations looking for interesting project ideas or potential partners can search the database simply by using key words and other criteria such as 'specific objective' or 'country'. Please note that **the programme does not screen the ideas submitted by community members**, nor can it guarantee their relevance to Interreg Europe.

The programme also provides the following support when a call for proposals is open:

- **Feedback on project ideas** may be requested from the joint secretariat through the online community member 'dashboard' once an idea has been submitted. Applicants can receive written or oral feedback on their project idea. Oral feedback will be provided remotely through individual consultations (phone or TEAMS) or in person on information days (see below). This assistance may also be available shortly before a call is opened.

- **Information days** provide general information on the programme and on calls for proposals to potential applicants wishing to submit a project application. These events are mainly for the benefit of applicants who are at an early stage of developing their project ideas. They are organised by each partner state's point of contact. Depending on the organiser, the event may be coupled with individual consultations on project ideas.

- **Lead applicant workshops** aim to assist applicants at a more mature stage of development with their project ideas by offering practical workshops on more detailed features of the call for proposals and the application form (e.g., being clear on the selected partnership and policy context, building a well-

structured work plan, avoiding budgeting mistakes).

The programme's website _www.interregeurope.eu_ provides full information on project development and applications, including contact details for the joint secretariat. Applicants wishing to speak to a member of staff should not hesitate to contact the joint secretariat either by phone or by e-mail.

Successful projects require good preparation. All project partners should therefore be closely involved in preparing their project's application. Moreover, the preparation of a good application can only be ensured after a careful reading of the programme documents and in particular the present programme manual. In particular, the description of the eligibility and quality criteria (see _section 4.3,_ Selection of projects) provides essential information on the programme's requirements and on how applications are assessed.

Partner search should start at an early stage of the preparation phase in order to properly involve the potential partners in the preparation of the proposal. Early contact between future partners also contributes to building trust and confidence within the partnership, which can facilitate the future management of the project. In addition to the partner search database mentioned above, Interreg Europe also recommends that projects make use of the following:

- **Partner search events,** which are organised at programme level. These events propose a certain number of tools to help participants promote their project ideas or to find relevant partners in their field of interest. Details of upcoming events are published regularly on the Interreg Europe website.

- **Partner state points of contact** / national authorities provide additional assistance and can confirm partner eligibility (see 'In my country' section at *www.interregeurope.eu*).

- **Existing EU networks** may also be contacted when looking for a partner with specific expertise or from a specific geographical location.

4.2 Applications

Applications are submitted to the programme through calls for proposals. Calls will be organised throughout the lifetime of the programme subject to the availability of programme funds. Applications can be submitted at any time between the launch date and the closing date of each call. The specifications and requirements for each call will be set out in **terms of reference**, which will be published on the programme website (*www.interregeurope.eu*) when a call is launched.

What to submit?

- **Application form**
- **Declarations** (signed pdf version) from all partners (including the lead partner) and associated policy authorities.

How to submit?

- **The application is fully online**. All the above documents must therefore be submitted using the online *Portal*.

Applications or documents sent after the deadline will not be accepted.

All sections of the application form (except 'Name of organisation in original language' in section B.1) must be completed in English as this is the programme's working language. Application forms completed in any other language will be considered ineligible.

Declarations must be signed. Electronic signatures[1] will be accepted if evidence of this electronic signature is provided. This evidence usually takes the form of an electronic certificate included in the pdf document. If is not possible to supply this certificate, then the lead applicant must provide evidence that the document has been electronically signed (e.g., certificate to be scanned together with the declaration and submitted as one pdf document in the Portal).

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1. Electronic signature refers to data in electronic form, which is logically associated with other data in electronic form and which is used by the signatory to sign.

The Portal includes several automatic links and formulas. These features mean that error messages will appear if the application is not fully or properly filled in, with the consequence that it cannot be submitted. This helps to significantly reduce the risk of ineligible applications being submitted. On the other hand, **the absence of error message does not guarantee that the eligibility criteria are fulfilled** (e.g., the system cannot check whether meaningful text is provided in the sections of the application form or if the correct version of a declaration is uploaded on the Portal).

A. Online application form

Once created, the application form is available for the user online in the *Portal* at any time for consultation but editing and submission is only possible during an 'open' call for proposals. Detailed instructions on how to fill in the online application form can be found in the application form itself.

The application must be submitted via the online form system.

B. Declaration from partners and associated policy authorities

At the application stage, Interreg Europe requires proof that the financial contributions of the lead and other partners have been secured and will be available to fund the project activities as laid out in the application form. This proof is delivered in the form of a declaration, which is **obligatory for every partner listed in the application form**, i.e., for both EU and non-EU partners.

Interreg Europe also requires proof that associated policy authorities (if any) are committed to the project. Therefore, all 'associated policy authorities' must also provide a declaration. The declarations are a pre-requisite for a project proposal to be eligible for the programme. It is therefore important to take this requirement into account early in the preparation phase so that the declarations can be made available, at the latest, before the closure of the call when the application must be submitted. The name of the partner and/or associated policy authority mentioned in the declaration must be identical to the organisation name mentioned in the 'Partnership' of the application form. Finally, the declarations must be signed by the relevant person within the organisation and stamped, if a stamp is available. Only the model provided by the programme can be accepted and the wording must not be modified. The scanned version of the signed declarations must be uploaded in the *Portal*. Before submitting their applications, applicants should carefully check whether they have uploaded the correct version of each declaration.

4.3 Selection of projects

Once submitted, each application is subject to a two-step selection procedure. Project proposals are first checked against the eligibility criteria in order to ensure that they fulfil the programme's administrative requirements. Only proposals that comply with the eligibility criteria step go on to the second step. **It is not possible to submit corrected documents after the submission deadline.**

The second step of the selection procedure is the quality assessment. This involves checking the application form against five criteria. It is based on a scoring system, resulting in a ranked list of all eligible applications.

The assessment is carried out by the joint secretariat. For each step of the assessment, a 'four eye principle' is applied.

Important: Calls may include specific conditions in their terms of reference which deviate from the selection criteria defined below. Applicants should therefore read the terms of reference for each call carefully. Calls are published on the programme website: *www.interregeurope.eu***.**

4.3.1 Eligibility assessment

The eligibility assessment is a 'yes or no' process. This means that it does not allow for any flexibility in the way criteria are applied. **The non-fulfilment of one criterion will render the whole application ineligible.**

Under the previous programming (2014/2020), more than a quarter of the applications (26.6%) failed to pass the eligibility step. **Applicants should therefore study the following criteria carefully and check before submitting whether their application fulfills each criterion.**

The assessor must answer 'yes' to all the following eligibility questions for the application to pass the eligibility check and reach the second step of the selection procedure:

Overview

Eligibility criteria	
1. Respect of the submission deadline	The online application is submitted at the latest by the deadline set in the call.
2. Completeness of the application	The application is complete. It includes the application form itself and all required declarations.
3. Correctness of the application form	The application form is fully and properly filled in according to the instructions.
4. Correctness of the declaration	The declarations are correct. The programme's template is used, and declarations are properly filled in and signed. If only one declaration is incorrect, the criterion will still be considered as being fulfilled.
5. Geographical coverage	The application involves partners from three, four or five geographical areas[1] defined below by the programme (North, East, South, West and Candidate countries area). These partners should also represent at least three countries, of which at least two partners must be from EU Member States, with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding[2].
6. Focus on Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes	At least one policy instrument addressed in the application is an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme.
7. Participation of policy responsible authorities	The policy responsible authorities are involved as partners for at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in the application. For any instruments where this is not the case, the relevant policy responsible authorities are involved as 'associated policy authorities'.

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1. The number of areas to be represented in projects is defined in the terms of reference of each call. This eligibility criterion does not apply to applications where more than one underline outermost region is involved. In such a case, the minimum regulatory requirement applies (projects must involve partners from at least three countries, at least two of which shall be beneficiaries from Member States and financed by the Interreg Europe programme).

*2. This latter specification is required due to the possibility for organisations to use funds from their Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes to participate in an Interreg Europe project (see **section 3.4.1.2** of the programme manual).*

Further details on each criterion

Criterion 1: Respect of the submission deadline

The online application, which comprises the application form and its compulsory annexes (i.e., declarations) is submitted by the deadline set for the call. The system ensures that it is not technically possible to submit an application form and its annexes after the call has closed.

Criterion 2: Completeness of the application

The application is complete. i.e., it includes:

- the application form

- the signed declarations (scanned versions) for all the partners, **including the lead partner** and all associated policy authorities listed in the application.

Criterion 3: Correctness of the application form

The application is fully and properly filled in according to the instructions. It is in English. In order to help applicants, the online application form provides error messages when sections of the form are not properly filled in (e.g., empty cells). However, the error messages cannot cover all eventualities. For instance, even if text is provided in a cell, the system cannot check whether this text is in English or whether it is meaningful. **The absence of error messages does not guarantee that the application form is correctly filled in**. Applicants should carefully follow the instructions provided in the application form itself.

Criterion 4: Correctness of the declarations

For each declaration[1]:

- it is signed

- the name of the partner or the associated policy authority indicated in the declaration is identical to the name of the partner or the associated policy authority indicated in the application form

- the programme model is used and, other than the fields to be filled in, no amendment is made to the text.

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1. If only one declaration is incorrect, the criterion will still be considered as being fulfilled.

Criterion 5: Geographical coverage

The application includes partners from either three, four or five (see footnote) geographical areas defined by the programme (North, East, South, West and Candidate countries)..[1]

Geographical areas	Countries covered
North	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
East	Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
South	Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain
West	Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland
Candidate countries area	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine

In compliance with Article 23 (1) of the ETC regulation (EC) 2021/1059, the application also includes partners from three countries, of which at least two partners are from EU Member States, with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding.

This eligibility criterion is checked only once at the application stage.

Criterion 6: Focus on Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes

At least one policy instrument addressed by the application is an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme.

Applicants should be careful when completing the related question in the 'Policy instruments' section of the application form (i.e., 'is this policy instrument an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme?'). To answer 'yes' to this question, it is not sufficient that the policy instrument addressed is linked to an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme, it must be the operational programme itself. For instance, the Sustainability Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) of a particular city cannot be considered an operational programme even if it is fully financed through this programme. To be considered an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme, the applicant must describe the corresponding investment priority of the operational programme, and not the SUMP, in the section of the application form dedicated to the policy instruments.

The fulfilment of this criterion also implies that the relevant managing authority or intermediate body is indicated as policy responsible authority for the related Investment for jobs and growth goal programme.

This eligibility criterion is checked only once at the application stage.

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1. The exact requirement in terms of minimum geographical coverage will be specified in the terms of reference of each call for proposals. This eligibility criterion does not apply to applications where more than one _outermost region_ is involved. In such a case, the following regulatory requirement applies: projects must involve partners from at least three countries, of which at least two partners must be from Member States with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding.

Criterion 7: Participation of policy responsible authorities

For at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in the application, the policy responsible authorities must be involved as partners. For policy instruments where this is not the case, (if any), the relevant policy responsible authority is involved as 'associated policy authority'.

Applicants should therefore be careful when completing the related field in the section 'Policy instruments' of the application form (i.e., 'please select the authority responsible for this policy instrument'). To be considered a 'policy responsible authority', the organisation must have a clear responsibility in the development and/or delivery of the policy instrument it addresses. If there is doubt, the assessor can contact the relevant Partner State to confirm the policy relevance of the organisation.

Please note that the absence of error messages related to the participation of policy responsible authorities in the application form does not guarantee that the proposal is eligible.

In case of unclarity on the nature and/or scope of the policy instrument itself (and as long as criterion 6 is met), criterion 7 will still be fulfilled if the body indicated as responsible for this instrument is clearly a 'policy responsible authority' (e.g., local or regional public authority).

This eligibility criterion is checked only once at the application stage.

4.3.2 Quality assessment

The quality assessment applies only to applications which pass the eligibility check. This check consists of evaluating the quality of the eligible applications according to the following five criteria:

Criterion 1 – Relevance of proposal

Criterion 2 – Quality of the expected results

Criterion 3 – Quality of partnership

Criterion 4 – Coherence of the proposal and quality of approach

Criterion 5 – Budget

Criteria 1, 2 and 3 are **strategic criteria** relating to the overall relevance of the application, i.e., the project's contribution to the achievement of the programme objectives. **Criteria 4 and 5** are **operational criteria** related to the proposal's consistency, feasibility, and value for money.

Assessors attribute a score to each quality criterion. The score goes from 0, which is eliminatory, to 5. The scale is as follows:

5	**very good**
4	**good**
3	**adequate**
2	**poor**
1	**very poor**
0	**elimination score**

Assessors will attribute an eliminatory score in the following cases:

•   information in the application form is so poor that it cannot be assessed in a proper manner

•   information provided calls into question the feasibility or the eligibility of the project proposal

•   partnerships in which at least 80% of the partners come from the same cross-border or transnational cooperation area, or in which at least 80% of the funding is allocated to the same cross-border or transnational cooperation area.

The scoring process results in an average score per application. Based on this average score, the joint secretariat produces a ranked list.

The result of an assessment is more than a simple addition of independent scores but rather a **qualitative reflection on interdependent criteria**. This means that in practice one criterion cannot fully be assessed independently of the others. This methodology implies the following:

•   A successful result from the assessment of the **operational criteria cannot compensate for an unsuccessful result from the assessment of the strategic criteria**. Due to the interdependence between the criteria, an application that fails to reach an average score of 3.00 for the three first criteria will never reach a final average score of 3.00 on all five criteria, even if this is mathematically possible (in other words, if the average score of the strategic criteria is below 3.00, the average score of the operational criteria cannot exceed 3.00).

•   The **final average score of an assessment is at least as important as the score given per criterion.** For instance, even if an application is scored just below 3.00 at the end of the assessment, this will not only be because one criterion's score is just one point short of 3.00 but because the application has fundamentally failed to demonstrate its overall relevance to the programme.

When deciding on a score for each of the criteria, the assessors will use the following quality assessment guidelines. **Applicants should carefully study these guidelines before preparing their application.**

Quality assessment criteria

Criterion 1 – Relevance of proposal	
Sub-category	**Indicative assessment questions** (and indicative source in application form)
Relevance of the issue addressed	• Is the issue addressed clearly related to regional development in general and to EU cohesion policy in particular? Is it clearly in line with the responsibilities of the relevant authorities at local, regional, and national levels? (A.2, C.1, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E) • Is the issue addressed by the project clear and sufficiently focused? (A.2, C.1, C.2, Part D, Part E) • Is the issue addressed clearly reflected the different policy instruments addressed? (Part D) • Does the theme clearly offer European added-value? Can this theme be considered of general interest in the context of EU regional policy? (A.2, C.1, C.2, C.3, Part D, Part E)
Relevance of the proposed approach	• Is the issue addressed by the project clearly tackled at policy level? (C.1, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E) • Does the project have a clear focus on the exchange of experience, and does it clearly capitalise on the partners' experience? Is the exchange of experience at the policy level at the heart of the project's activities? (C.1, C.2, C.4, Part B, Part D, Part E) • If applicable, is the contribution of the pilot actions to the learning process clear? (C.4, Part D, Part E) • Does the project clearly demonstrate how it will contribute to the programme's objectives and in particular to the improvement of regional / local policy instruments? (C.1, C.2, C.4, Part B, Part D, Part E) • Is the proposed approach clearly interregional? If applicable, is the interregional character of the pilot action(s) clear? (A.2, C.1, C.2, C.4, C.6, C.8, Part B, Part E) • Will the proposed cooperation benefit all partners? (Part B, Section C.4, Part D, Part E)

Criterion 2 – Quality of the expected results	
Sub-category	**Indicative assessment questions** (and indicative source in application form)
Tangibility of the expected outputs and results	• Are the expected outputs and results clearly defined and precisely quantified? Are they realistic? (C.5, Part D, Part E) • Is the expected improvement of the policy instruments addressed clearly explained and realistic? (Part D) • If applicable, is the 'test-oriented' character of the pilot action(s) clear? (Part D, Part E)
Relevance of the expected results	• Does the project demonstrate a capacity to influence the policy instruments addressed by the end of the core phase? (Part B, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E) • If applicable, is the policy relevance (including durability) of the pilot actions properly demonstrated? Is the additionality of the pilot actions confirmed? (Part D, Part E)
Innovative character of the proposal	• Is the innovative character of the proposal convincingly explained? What is the added-value with respect to other running or past projects? (C.1, C.3, C.4, Part D, Part E) • Are potential synergies with similar running projects clarified in the application form? (C.4, C.4, Part E) • For follow-up projects, is the added value clearly demonstrated in particular through the partnership, and/or the theme tackled? (Part B, C.1, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E) • If applicable, is the innovative character of the pilot actions clear? (C.3, Part D, Part E)

Criterion 3 – Quality of partnership	
Sub-category	**Indicative assessment questions** (and indicative source in application form)
Relevance of the partnership to the proposal	• Is the issue addressed of interest to all partners? Will all the partners benefit from, and contribute to, the project? (Part B, Part D, Part E, Part F) • Do the partners have responsibility for the issue addressed by the project? (Part B, Part D) • Is the partners' policy relevance clearly demonstrated? Is their capacity to influence the policy instrument addressed explained? (Part D) • Are the stakeholders identified relevant to the issue addressed by the project? Is their involvement in the project clearly described? (C.4, Part D, Part E) • Are the partners involved in other Interreg Europe applications and/or projects? If yes, is this multiple involvement justified? (C.3, C.4 Part D, Part E) • If applicable, is the role of the advisory partner in the project clear? (Part B, C.4, Part E)
Proportionate involvement of all partners in implementing and co-financing activities	• Does the involvement of all partners seem balanced? If not, is there a justification in the application form or evidence of this in the project's approach? (C.4, Part D, Part E, Part F) • Is the financial contribution between the partners proportionate and realistic? Is any imbalance justified? (C.1, C.4, Part D, Part E, Part F)
Good mix of regions with different levels of development	• Is the partnership a mix involving both more and less developed regions? If not, is there a justification in the application form or evidence in the project's approach? (Part B, C.1, C.2 C.4, Part D, Part E, Part F)
Geographical coverage	• Does the partnership clearly go beyond cross-border and transnational programme areas? If not, is there a justification in the application form or evidence in the project's approach? (Part B, C.1, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E, Part F) • Is the budget allocation between the countries balanced (including between a group of geographically close countries and the other countries represented)? If not, is there a justification in the application form? (C.1, C.2, C.4, Part D, Part E, Part F)

Criterion 4 – Coherence of the proposal and quality of the approach	
Sub-category	**Indicative assessment questions** (and indicative source in application form)
Coherence of the proposed approach	• Are the following elements logically inter-related: issue tackled, objectives, expected results and planned activities? (C.1, C.2, C.3, C.4, Part D) • Can the expected results be achieved through the proposed approach and planned activities? (C.1, C.2, C.3, C.4, Part D, Part E) • Is the proposed overall approach clear, realistic, and coherent? Are activities logically inter-linked? Is their sequencing logical? (C.4, Part E) • If applicable, are pilot actions properly defined? Are they clearly integrated into the exchange of experience process? (Part D, Part E)
Quality of the work plan	• Are the planned activities and outputs described in enough detail in the project's work plan? (Part D, Part E) • For each semester of the work plan, are the main outputs in line with the description of the activities? (Part E)
Quality of communication	• Is the communication strategy clearly defined and well-integrated in the overall project strategy? (C.6, Part E) • Are sufficient measures planned for disseminating the work and results of project activities? (C.6, Part E)
Quality of management	• Are the management and coordination provisions at strategic and operational levels clearly defined and coherent? (C.8) • Are these provisions transparent and fair? (C.8)
Consistency of the project with EU horizontal policies	• Does the project comply with EU horizontal policies (sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women)? (C.7)

Criterion 5 – Budget	
Sub-category	**Indicative assessment questions** (and indicative source in application form)
Value for money	• Is the overall budget reasonable given the planned activities/outputs and the project duration? Is the overall budget reasonable given the number of partners involved? (A.1, A.3, Part E, Part F) • Is the value for money demonstrated in the context of Interreg Europe? (all) • Is the budget share dedicated to 'external expertise and services' within the recommendation (i.e., below 50% of the total budget)? If not, is it justified? (F.1, F.2) • If office equipment costs are budgeted, is the amount within the recommendations (i.e., max 7,000 per project)? If not, is it justified? (F.3) • For pilot actions, if costs are planned under external expertise and services and/or equipment, and/or infrastructure and works, are the amounts reasonable given the planned activities/outputs? (F.2, F.3, F.4, Part D, Part E) • Is it clear from the planned activities that there is no risk of double funding? (Part C, Part E, Part F)
Compliance with state-aid rule	• Is it confirmed that none of the regular exchange of experience activities is state aid relevant? (Part E) • For pilot actions, is there any activity that can be classified as state aid relevant? is this in line with the partner's self-assessment? (D.1.4, D.1.5)
Consistency of the budget with planned activities	• Is the budget by cost categories coherent and in line with the planned activities? (F.1, Part E) • Is the spending plan coherent and realistic? Does it reflect the distribution of the activities in the work plan? (F.6) • For the 'External expertise and services' cost category: is the level and nature of the costs justified and in line with the planned activities? Is there a risk that public procurement rules will not be respected (e.g., the name of the company is mentioned)? For pilots and / or 'external expertise: for external support items, are the costs clearly described? (F.2, Part E) • If equipment / infrastructure and works costs are budgeted for a pilot, are they justified by the planned activities? Are they clearly described? (F.3, F.4, Part D, Part E) • If activities are organised outside the programme area, is the location of these activities clearly specified (i.e., country or town)? Are any activities taking place outside the programme area relevant and justified? (Part E, Part F)

4.3.3 The decision-making process

After completion of the first step of the assessment (eligibility assessment), the monitoring committee decides on the results of the eligibility assessment. The lead applicants of ineligible applications will receive a notification letter specifying the unfulfilled eligibility criteria.

Only eligible applications go through the quality assessment. Applications successfully passing the quality assessment (i.e., reaching at least an average score of 3.00) will be recommended for approval or recommended for approval with conditions to the monitoring committee[1].

Applications where a criterion is given an eliminatory score will not benefit from a full assessment. Only the reason(s) for the eliminatory score will be explained in the assessment results.

The final decision on applications is made by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee, based on the results of the quality assessment.

All lead applicants are informed of the decision on their proposal soon after the meeting of the monitoring committee. The lead applicants of rejected applications will receive a notification letter with a summary of the quality assessment results. They are thereby informed of the reasons why their application failed.

The lead partners of approved applications receive a notification letter stating the decision of the monitoring committee as well as the total Interreg and possible Norwegian funds approved. In most cases, the decision includes certain conditions deriving from the results of the quality assessment. A precise deadline for fulfilling these conditions is indicated in the notification letter. The subsidy contract can be concluded only once these conditions have been fulfilled.

4.4 Complaints procedure – project selection

The programme informs in writing the project lead applicants of rejected proposals of the reasons why their application was ineligible or could not be approved. If a project wishes to file a complaint, a two-step procedure must be respected. The relevant form is available from the programme's website.

In a first step, the lead applicant should address its questions about or raise its objections to the eligibility or quality assessment decisions to the joint secretariat. These questions must be submitted within three weeks of the date of the official notification of the non-selection of the project by the managing authority/joint secretariat. The managing authority/joint secretariat will examine and answer the questions to help resolve any problems in an amicable manner.

In a second step, if a project is not satisfied with the answer provided and considers that procedures have not been respected, a project that has not been selected for funding may file a formal complaint, the procedure for which is detailed below.

In principle, complaints can only be lodged in relation to the following criteria:

(1) the assessment does not reflect the information provided by the lead applicant

(2) the project assessment and selection process failed to comply with the specific procedures laid down in the call publication and programme manual that materially affected or could have materially affected the decision.

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1. On the condition that sufficient funding is available.

Only the project's lead applicant can file a complaint. Potential complaints from partners must go through the lead applicant. Complaints must be submitted in writing (post or email) to the joint secretariat within two weeks after the joint secretariat has answered the step 1 query submitted by the lead applicant.

The complaint(s) will be examined and answered by a complaint panel involving the previous, current, and future chairs of the monitoring committee as well as the managing authority. If deemed necessary, the complaint panel may decide to refer a complaint back to the programme's monitoring committee.

For complaints against decisions of the programme's managing authority/ joint secretariat during project implementation and complaints related to control or second level audit, further information can be found in *section 5.5* (Complaints procedure – project implementation).

5. Project implementation

5.1 Getting started

5.1.1 Start date

The monitoring committee will usually meet within eight months after the end of each call to approve projects. Project partners should be ready to start their project as soon as possible after the monitoring committee's decision, approximately within two months from the date of this decision.

The actual start date is determined for each call for proposals individually and communicated to the projects at the time of their approval.

5.1.2 Timeframe for the eligibility of expenditure

Costs for project activities are eligible from the date of the monitoring committee's approval of the project until the end date of the project.

For partners from the 7 EU candidate countries, no report can be paid by the programme before the signature of a Financing Agreement between the European Commission, the Managing Authority and the government of their country. However, the date of signature of the financing agreement does not affect the date of eligibility of the costs.

The end date of the project marks the end of the eligibility period for expenditure, and it is the date by which the last progress report must be submitted to the joint secretariat. For more information on project closure, see *section 5.4* (Project closure).

5.1.3 Subsidy contract

Once a project has been selected for funding and has fulfilled the conditions laid down by the monitoring committee, a subsidy contract between the programme's managing authority and the project's lead partner is concluded. The subsidy contract establishes the rights and responsibilities of the lead partner and the managing authority.

The subsidy contract covers both phases of a project (core phase and follow-up phase). A model of the subsidy contract is available on the programme's website.

5.1.4 Project partnership agreement

In line with Article 26 (1) (a) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 and in order to ensure the quality of project implementation, the achievement of objectives, and sound financial management, the lead partner must conclude a project partnership agreement with its partners. This agreement allows the lead partner to extend the arrangements of the subsidy contract to the level of each partner. In particular, the agreement should include the following information:

- the role and obligations of the individual partners in the partnership in relation to project implementation

- partner budgets for each cost category and spending plans for each six-monthly period, plus the allocation of the preparation costs lump sum per partner if applicable

- provisions for changes (notably for partnership changes, changes to the work plan, etc.)

- financial management provisions for accounting, reporting, financial control, timeframe for the transfer of Interreg funds payments from the lead partner to the other partners

- liability in the event of non-compliance with partners obligations (including failure in project delivery and project spending)

- the partner's financial liability and provisions for the recovery of funds in the event of amounts being incorrectly reported and funds being unduly received by the partner

- Procedures for conflict resolution in the partnership.

An example of a project partnership agreement template is available on the programme's website.

Interreg Europe recommends that the project partnership agreement should be drawn up as early as possible. Its principles should ideally be agreed prior to the submission of the project application. Early agreement on partnership working will help to shorten the project's start-up phase following approval and will ensure that partners have a common understanding of the practical and financial implications of participating in the project. To facilitate this, and where useful, certain decisions, relating to decision making processes or communication within the partnership, for example, may be left until the first project meeting and agreed in a separate document (e.g., the project steering committee's rules of procedure).

The lead partner assumes the overall responsibility for the project vis-à-vis the managing authority. Through the project partnership agreement, project partners are responsible and assume liability for their part in implementing the project vis-à-vis the lead partner. This means that in the event of irregularities committed by a partner and leading to a financial correction, the lead partner assumes liability for the related funds vis-à-vis the managing authority through the subsidy contract and the project partner assumes liability vis-à-vis the lead partner through the project partnership agreement.

Please note that only partners who have signed the project partnership agreement are allowed to report expenditure.

Any necessary amendments to the partnership agreement will be the responsibility of the lead partner in agreement with the partnership. In principle, the programme does not require projects to amend the partnership agreement when changes to the project are approved by the programme through the request for change procedure or justified through the progress reports. However, if a change in the partnership implies the inclusion of a new partner, this new partner organisation will have to sign the partnership agreement before they can report costs to their controller.

5.2 Reporting

In order to monitor project implementation and as a condition for the Interreg funds reimbursement, a **progress report** must be submitted periodically to the programme. The progress report is a core document because it constitutes the main channel of information between the projects and the programme. It includes information on both the content of the project (activity/results) and its financial status and progress.

The progress report is also a core source of information about the programme's overall achievements. It provides the data needed to generate consolidated statistics and to analyse the programme's achievements. This information feeds into the programme's communication work and official documents, such as the programme evaluations or reports for the European Commission.

Projects should therefore not see the progress report as a mere administrative task for obtaining an Interreg funds reimbursement. It should be seen as a means for sharing stories about the project, about its results and successes, with the joint secretariat.

The programme uses an online reporting system which is accessible in the *Portal*. Each partner has access to the system using an individual username and password. Progress reports must be submitted to the programme through this Portal.

Watch our video

Tutorials on the Portal for project partners

5.2.1 Reporting periods and deadlines

In principle, each progress report covers a reporting period of six months. Only the first and last reports cover a period that is slightly longer:

- The first progress report covers the period from the date the project is approved by the monitoring committee to the end of the first six months of activities

- The final report covers a nine-month period (six months of implementation + three months of closure).

The progress report needs to be submitted to the programme three months after the end of the reporting period, except for the last progress report which must be submitted by the end date of the project. The dates of the reporting periods are set by the programme.

1st call reporting periods

Progress report	Reporting period	Deadline for submission
First (= PR1)	**13/12/2022** – 31/08/2023	01/12/2023
PR2	01/09/2023 – 29/02/2024	01/06/2024
PR3	01/03/2024 – 31/08/2024	01/12/2024
PR4	01/09/2024 – 28/02/2025	01/06/2025
PR5	01/03/2025 – 31/08/2025	01/12/2025
PR6	01/09/2025 – 28/02/2026	01/06/2026
PR7	01/03/2026 – 31/08/2026	01/12/2026
Last (= PR8)	01/09/2026 – **31/05/2027** (nine months)	31/05/2027 (= end of the project = end date of eligibility)

2nd call reporting periods

Progress report	Reporting period	Deadline for submission
First (= PR1)	**12/12/2023** – 30/09/2024	02/01/2025
PR2	01/10/2024 – 31/03/2025	01/07/2025
PR3	01/04/2025 – 30/09/2025	02/01/2026
PR4	01/10/2025 – 31/03/2026	01/07/2026
PR5	01/04/2026 – 30/09/2026	02/01/2027
PR6	01/10/2026 – 31/03/2027	01/07/2027
PR7	01/04/2027 – 30/09/2027	02/01/2028
Last (= PR8)	01/10/2027 – **30/06/2028** (nine months)	30/06/2028 (= end of the project = end date of eligibility)

3ʳᵈ call reporting periods

Progress report	Reporting period	Deadline for submission
First (= PR1)	**10/12/2024** – 31/10/2025	01/02/2026
PR2	01/11/2025 – 30/04/2026	01/08/2026
PR3	01/05/2026 – 31/10/2026	01/02/2027
PR4	01/11/2026 – 30/04/2027	01/08/2027
PR5	01/05/2027 – 31/10/2027	01/02/2028
PR6	01/11/2027 – 30/04/2028	01/08/2028
PR7	01/05/2028 – 31/10/2028	01/02/2029
Last (= PR8)	01/11/2028 – **31/07/2029** (nine months)	31/07/2029 (= end of the project = end date of eligibility)

Points to note:

- As in the 2014 – 2020 programme, reporting period start and end dates will depend on the date of approval of each call by the monitoring committee. This allows the reporting and control work to be staggered both for the partners participating in several calls and for the controllers.

- For the last progress report, the date by which the progress report needs to arrive at the joint secretariat also marks the end date of eligibility. Please study *section 5.4* (Project closure) carefully for further information.

5.2.2 Reporting procedures

All reporting must be done in the *Portal*.

The reporting procedure for projects is as follows:

1. Each project partner (including the lead partner) compiles and submits the partner report to a controller (see also **section 6.7** Verification of expenditure to be reported) within two weeks after the end of the reporting period, so that the lead partner has sufficient time to compile the joint progress report. The partner's financial report in the Portal must include:

   • The list of expenditure (incl. the list of contracts)

   • The control certificate

   • The control report (including control checklist).

2. The lead partner includes the partner reports that have been confirmed by a controller in the joint progress report. Based on the information on the activities carried out, the lead partner also compiles the joint progress report.

3. The lead partner submits the joint progress report to the joint secretariat. By doing so, the lead partner confirms that:

   • the information provided by partners is accurately reflected in the joint progress report

   • the costs included result from implementing the project as planned and as set out in the application form and described in the progress report.

4. The joint secretariat checks the report and, if necessary, sends clarification requests to the lead partner. Once all points have been clarified, the progress report can be approved

5. The accounting body makes the payment to the lead partner[1]

6. The lead partner transfers the funds to the partners after receipt of the payment within the timeframe agreed in the partnership agreement in line with the amounts stated in the progress report.

Each progress report (and the project in general) is monitored by two officers from the joint secretariat. One officer focuses on the activities and results and the other focuses on financial matters. These officers provide joint feedback to the projects on their progress reports.

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1. Within approximately four weeks after the *approval* of the progress report by the joint secretariat.

5.2.3 Monitoring a project's progress and midterm review

As mentioned above, the progress report is a core tool for monitoring the progress made in implementing project activities. The basic principle of reporting and monitoring is to check the activities and outputs reported against what was originally planned in the application form. Beyond this minimum requirement, the aim is also to obtain as much qualitative information as possible on the lessons learnt and results achieved during the reporting period. Projects must be as precise as possible in the information they report.

In addition to the progress report, the programme uses other sources of information to monitor progress in implementation on a continuous basis. Among others, the programme uses:

- the project's website

- ad-hoc exchange with the lead partner and partners (e.g., online meetings or phone conferences)

- midterm review meetings.

The **midterm review** meeting between the joint secretariat and the lead partner should take place, in principle, during the fourth semester of project activities (i.e., second semester of year 2 of implementation). It offers an opportunity for the programme to obtain a more detailed picture of the project's performance beyond the information provided in the progress reports.

The core objective of the midterm review is to check on progress towards the project objectives and prepare the ground for the second half of the project (including the follow-up phase). This review will primarily look at the following parameters:

- The state of play of the project in relation to policy improvement in each participating region

- The project's spending rate

- Whether or not the project is requesting a pilot action (see also *section 3.2.1* for the detailed procedure).

For projects accumulating significant underspending, their ability to spend the total budget by the end of the project will be reassessed. If the project then cannot demonstrate the feasibility of spending its total budget to carry out the remaining activities, the midterm review may lead to a budget reduction proportional to the amount of underspending. The aim is to return unspent funds as early as possible to the programme so they can be used to support other activities.

5.2.4 Partners not reporting expenditure

In cases where project partners do not report any expenditure after two semesters, the programme will issue a warning to the lead partner of the project after the submission of the relevant progress report. The monitoring committee member representing the Partner State of the project partner in question will be informed. Should the project partner in question not report expenditure in its third progress report and cannot provide evidence that this is due to circumstances outside its control, the programme will reduce the project partner's budget taking into account its spending plan. This budget reduction will be implemented after the midterm review meeting.

5.2.5 Guidance for reporting

The following guidance should help projects to provide concise and coherent information in their progress reports.

Consistency of content and terminology

For the overall coherence of the report, the information provided about the activities and outputs must be fully consistent. This also means that the terminology should be consistent throughout the report and in line with the terminology used in the application form.

Reporting on indicators

Before reporting on indicators, the partnership should study the definition provided for each indicator in *section 3.3.2* (Performance framework & indicators) carefully. In addition, Appendix 2 provides information about the performance framework and this is also important for an understanding of the programme's intervention logic.

Coherence between activities and expenditure

All reported expenditure needs to be in line with the activities carried out and reported in the respective reporting period. When compiling the progress report, the project must make sure that for any expenditure included, a clear link to the activities can be made. For instance, if expenditure linked to the organisation of a meeting is reported in the cost category 'external expertise and services', this meeting should be reported as an activity and output/result.

Reporting on communication activities

Reporting on communication activities is part of the routine reporting process. Projects should keep track of their progress/achievements against their objectives and indicators.

The evaluation of communication activities will be part of the midterm review with the joint secretariat (see more in *section 3.2.3*).

5.3 Changes in project implementation

5.3.1 General principles

All minor changes (e.g., rescheduling activities, budget changes within the 20% budget flexibility rule, see below) should be reported to the joint secretariat in the progress report. The report must include a justification for all such minor changes (relative to the initial plans), a description of their consequences on project activities and, where applicable, the solution(s) proposed to tackle these consequences and to avoid similar deviations in the future.

Changes in contact partner details (e.g., new contact person, new e-mail address) need to be changed in the reporting system.

For major changes, and in accordance with the subsidy contract, the project must request approval from the programme. Major changes may concern:

- the partnership (e.g., withdrawal, replacement of a partner)
- the project's core activities (including the introduction of a pilot action after the midterm review)
- the project's budget (reallocation above the 20% flexibility rule, see below)
- the project's duration.

Major changes need to be formalised through a request for changes procedure. As a basic rule, lead partners should inform the joint secretariat as soon as they become aware of a possible major change in their project.

5.3.2 Request for changes procedure

For the major changes listed in 5.3.1 (General principles), the lead partner needs to fill in and submit a 'request for change' form to the programme in the _Portal_. Unless instructed otherwise, a change may be requested at any time during a project's lifetime.

The request for change template is based on the latest approved application form. The project must update the sections of the template that are affected by the change, including describing the requested change and providing a clear justification for it.

Depending on the nature of the requested changes, the decision on approval will be taken either by the managing authority/joint secretariat (see Mandate specified below) or by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee through a written procedure. The date when the changes take effect will be indicated in the notification letter approving the request for changes.

Projects should be aware that in principle a formal request for change procedure can only be launched during the lifetime of a project.

Mandate given by the Monitoring Committee to the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat to decide on changes:

The Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat may decide on changes as long as the purpose and the other basic features of the project are not altered by the proposed changes and these changes also do not have consequences on the eligibility or on the results of the project.

In particular, the managing authority/joint secretariat may decide on:

- additional minor conditions to approved projects if additional mistakes or errors are found or clarification requests made during the condition fulfilment phase with the lead partner

- a reallocation of the budget set out in the approved application, if the content and the implementation of the main activities do not change (with no increase in Interreg funds)

- changes in activities which do not change the overall objectives of the project

- an extension of the duration of the project not extending the programme deadline

- an extension of the date by which progress reports must be presented by the lead partner

- a reduction in the approved project budget when a project partner withdraws or reduces its activities or when the project is facing severe underspending and cannot demonstrate the feasibility of using their total budget by the end of the project

- the replacement of project partners provided that the respective Partner State on whose territory the new project partner is located approves this change

- administrative changes such as "legal successions" (see _section 5.3.6_), provided that the respective Partner State on whose territory the partner new legal entity is located approves this change.

5.3.3 Changes in activities/outputs

In the application form, applicants describe the activities and outputs in the work plans for each semester of both phases of the project. The work plan is therefore the project's roadmap and projects should stick to the original plan as much as possible. However, a project is not a static entity and changes may occur during a project's lifetime. These changes may be major or minor:

- If changes are minor (e.g., postponement of a conference, change in the location of a planned workshop) meaning that they will not have an impact on the main objectives of the project and only a minor impact on the budget, they may be reported and justified in the progress report (i.e., in the deviations section).

- If changes are major and have an impact on the main objectives of the project, they will require the formal approval of the Interreg Europe monitoring committee. Based on the experience of previous programming periods, this type of request for change remains the exception.

If in doubt as to a change is minor or not, the lead partner should contact the joint secretariat as early as possible to ascertain this. For major changes, the lead partner should systematically contact the responsible officers in the joint secretariat to request a formal change in activities/outputs. This would be the case if a project requests one or more pilot action(s) at midterm, for example.

5.3.4 Changes in the policy instruments addressed

During a project, it may turn out that one or several of the policy instruments addressed at the application stage are no longer relevant or can no longer be improved. Should this occur, partners must explain the reasons for the change in the progress report precisely. In duly justified cases, the partner region affected by such a change should then identify another relevant policy instrument to replace the original one. In principle, these changes do not lead to a modification of the application form but are indicated in the information provided in the regular progress report.

5.3.5 Changes in the partnership

The partnership is a core feature of a project and, as such, must be officially approved by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee. Therefore, changes in the partnership should be avoided wherever possible and all alternative solutions to resolving a problem must be considered before requesting a partnership change. Partnership changes can only be approved if they are duly justified.

The request for change form differentiates between two cases of partnership change:

a) Withdrawal of partner(s)

b) Addition of partner(s) (in most cases to replace a withdrawing partner).

If the withdrawal of one partner in the partnership cannot be avoided, the ideal solution would be to find a suitable replacement for this partner, preferably from the same region/country. The lead partner should always first verify if this option is feasible in cooperation with their Point of Contact. Only if this is unsuccessful should the lead partner propose a substitute partner from another region/country.

The other alternative is the withdrawal of the partner without replacement. To minimise the impact on the project, Interreg Europe recommends that, in such a scenario, an existing partner (or partners) take over, in full or in part, the role and activities of the withdrawing partner. Consequently, this also means that the budget allocations among partners may need to be partly revised.

The arrival of a new partner may also be possible after the midterm review, when the involvement of a new organisation is required to implement a pilot action. This type of change must be approved by the monitoring committee.

In all cases, the requested change must be clearly explained and justified. In addition, all relevant parts of the 'application form' will need to be updated; especially the 'Partnership' section but also all sections where the withdrawing partner is mentioned (e.g., 'policy instruments' section, work plan).

Once the joint secretariat receives the completed request for change form, it will check whether the request for change is acceptable. The joint secretariat will also ask the relevant Partner State representatives to confirm the eligibility of a new partner joining the partnership (where necessary).

Where a call for proposals includes specific geographical criteria, projects approved under that call finding themselves requiring a change in partnership should do their best to ensure that the revised partnership still complies with the same criteria.

5.3.6 Administrative changes

A legal change in the administrative status of a partner organisation leading to the transfer of rights and obligations to another legal entity (e.g., merger) is treated as a "legal succession". The new partner will be considered to be the old partners' legal successor and will inherit all the responsibilities, rights, and obligations related to the project. This change must be officially communicated to the joint secretariat without delay. It must be added to the application form through a formal request for change procedure.

A simple change of name of one partner, which has no impact on its legal status, does not require a formal request for change procedure. Nevertheless, a partner's change of name must be officially communicated to the joint secretariat (by updating the name of the partner in the *Portal*).

In cases where the legal status of a project partner changes from a public body or body governed by public law to a private non-profit body (or vice versa) during the project lifetime, the co-financing rate will not be affected. Project partners who undergo such a change should, for the reporting period concerned, report their national contribution as being private or public in line with their actual (new) legal status or the private or public nature of the co-financing contribution that they receive from an external source.

5.3.7 Changes to the project budget

Although the budget is a core element in the application form and is approved by the monitoring committee, changes to the budget may become necessary during a project's lifetime. Budget reallocations between partners and cost categories are possible **on the condition that the total amount(s) of Interreg and/or Norwegian funds awarded to a project are not exceeded**. Please note that an overspend on an Interreg funds amount cannot be counterbalanced by underspending Norwegian funds, or vice versa.

All changes must be duly justified in the context of a project's activities and objectives. In cases where the added value of changes cannot be demonstrated, the programme will reject the changes.

Budget reallocations between partners

Two types of budget change between partners are possible:

1. **A budget reallocation of up to 20% of the total partner budget stated in the latest approved application form (flexibility rule)**

A partner's total budget can be exceeded by a maximum of 20 % of the original total amount if this is compensated by an underspend in the budget(s) of other partner(s). This type of budget reallocation does not require the programme's formal prior approval but must be reported and justified through the progress report.

2. **A budget reallocation of over 20% of the total partner budget stated in the latest approved application form**

A budget reallocation between partners greater than the 20% budget flexibility limit requires a formal approval by the managing authority/ joint secretariat and it must be incorporated in the application form through a request for change procedure ("major budget change"). In principle, a major budget change should happen only once during a project's lifetime.

After a major budget change, the budget can be changed again within the limits of the flexibility rule described under point 1 (above) if this is justified by the project activities and a justification is provided in the progress report.

Any financial implications of a formal change in the partnership or in project activities / outputs (through a request for change procedure) will not be treated as a "major budget change" but as a consequence of the initial change.

Budget reallocations between cost categories

Budget amounts can be reallocated from one cost category to another, and the budget of a cost category can be exceeded (without a maximum limit) if this is fully justified by a project's needs and the project's activities remain in line with the application form.

Budget amounts can be reallocated to another cost category without prior approval from the programme, even if no costs were originally planned under that cost category in the application form, if this is justified by the project activities and a justification is provided in the progress report. Projects must also bear in mind the budget recommendations for external expertise and services and equipment (see *section 3.5* 'Drawing up a project budget').

Modifications to the equipment cost category should remain the exception. In principle, unplanned costs under this cost category should be approved by the joint secretariat. The programme therefore recommends that projects consult the joint secretariat before reallocating budget amounts to the cost category "Equipment costs".

Any unplanned costs under the cost category "Infrastructure and works" can only be eligible for funding in exceptional cases and must be approved by the joint secretariat.

▶

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20% flexibility rule
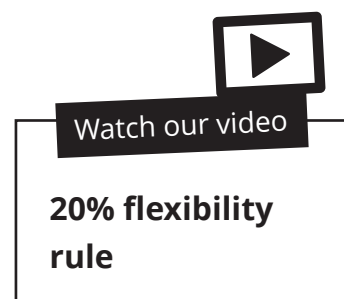
5.3.8 Extension of a project's duration

In principle, an extension to a project's duration should not be needed given the specific nature of the follow-up phase. Nonetheless, there may still be exceptional cases where the managing authority / joint secretariat may approve an extension of a project's duration (within the limits of the programme's end date).

5.4 Project closure

5.4.1 The end date for eligibility of expenditure and completion of activities

The project end date is the **date by which:**

- **all project activities must be completed (incl. all procedures related to the administrative closure of the project, such as financial control)**

- all payments must have been made, meaning debited from the bank account

- **the last progress report is submitted** to the joint secretariat.

Any expenditure incurred, invoiced, or paid after the project end date indicated in the latest approved application form will be ineligible.

Since the programme must be finalised by the end of 2029, all project activities must be completed and costs paid and reported by 31/07/2029 at the latest.

Projects should note that:

- The follow-up phase will involve one year of activities plus three months dedicated solely to administrative closure (preparation of the last progress report, final payments, expenditure control). It is therefore essential that no content-related activities are scheduled during these last three months. The last project meeting must, for example, be scheduled, at the latest, three months before the project's end date.

- Even if, in justified cases, the deadline for the submission of the final progress report is extended, this will not affect the eligibility end date. For example: the official project end date by which the last progress report needs to be submitted is 31/01/2027. A project is granted an extension of two weeks for its submission, until 15/02/2027. This would still mean that the eligibility of activities and expenditure ends on 31/01/2027.

- Not only must the expenditure be paid out by this date but the activities must also be finalised. This is particularly important for any expenditure linked to the financial control of the partner reports. It is not possible to make advance payments to the controller and then to have the actual checks (activity) carried out after the project's end date. The payment must have been made and the partner's financial report must be certified in the electronic monitoring system (Portal) by the project's end date for the costs to be eligible.

- It is important to consider allocating sufficient resources to project closure at the planning stage of the project. Projects may face severe delays before closure if the lead and other partners fail to allocate sufficient resources in terms of time and staff. Interreg Europe recommends that projects establish a timetable to clearly indicate by what date partners will be expected to submit relevant documents and information to the lead partner. This timetable should be closely monitored by the lead partner.

5.4.2 Obligations for closed projects

According to Article 82 of the Common Provision Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, each partner institution is required to archive documents related to their project activities for a minimum period. All supporting documents must be kept for at least a 5-year retention period from 31 December of the year in which the last payment by the managing authority to the project is made. Longer retention periods may apply in cases where state aid is involved or in accordance with national rules.

5.5 Complaints procedure - project implementation

Complaints related to expenditure control or audits of projects must be lodged against the authority responsible for the control or audit according to the applicable national rules.

The procedure for complaints against a decision of the managing authority/joint secretariat of the programme during project implementation is as follows:

The managing authority/joint secretariat and the lead partner must do everything possible to amicably settle any dispute between them arising during the project's lifetime and the duration of the validity of the subsidy contract. Complaints must be submitted in writing (post or email) to the joint secretariat within 3 weeks following the notification of a decision. Parties to any dispute must reply to a request for an amicable settlement within 3 weeks. If no amicable agreement is reached, the dispute may by common agreement of the parties be submitted for conciliation to the complaints panel, which is made up of the previous, present, and future chairs of the monitoring committee and the managing authority/joint secretariat. If this conciliation procedure fails, each party may submit the dispute to the courts. The place of jurisdiction is, as defined in the subsidy contract, Lille (France). Further details and specific complaint forms may be published at a later stage.

For complaints against decisions of the programme's managing authority regarding the assessment and funding decisions, further information can be found in *section 4.4* (Complaints procedure – project selection).

6. Financial management

6.1 Eligibility of expenditure - general principles

There are different levels of eligibility rules applying to expenditure made by partners from EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries participating in the programme:

- **the European level: EU regulations**

- **the programme level: specific rules decided for the Interreg Europe programme**

- **the national level: national rules applicable in each Partner State**

- **the partner institutional level: internal rules applicable to each partner organisation.**

In the absence of rules established at EU or programme level or in areas that are not subject to precise regulation, national, or internal rules apply.

To be eligible at project level, costs must:

- **relate to activities planned in the application form, be necessary for carrying out these activities as well as for achieving the project's objectives and be included in the estimated budget**

- **be in accordance with the principles of sound financial management i.e., be reasonable, justified**

- **consistent with the usual internal rules of the partner, the EU, the programme, and national rules**

- **be identifiable, verifiable, plausible, and determined in accordance with the applicable accounting principles**

- **be incurred and paid by the partner organisation, debited from its bank account no later than the project end date, be substantiated by proper evidence allowing identification and checking.**

Should expenditure be reimbursed based on a lump sum or flat rate, the latter two principles do not apply.

6.2 Cost Categories

Based on Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059, the following sections provide an overview on the eligibility principles for the different cost categories applicable in the programme:

- **staff**

- **office and administration**

- **travel and accommodation**

- **external expertise and services**

- **equipment**

- **infrastructure and works.**

6.2.1 Staff costs

Staff costs cover costs for staff members employed by the partner organisation and who work on the project directly. Staff costs refers to the partner organisation's gross employment costs, which usually comprise:

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Understanding staff costs

- **Salary payments (specified in an employment/ work contract)**

- **Other costs directly linked to salary payments paid and not recoverable by the employer:**

  - **Employment taxes**

  - **Social security (including health coverage and pension contributions).**

In accordance with the partner organisation's personnel policy, costs such as bonuses, fuel, lease car, relocation benefits, luncheon vouchers, etc. can be fully or partly claimed after calculating the share eligible for the project. Only the costs or the share of the costs that are not recoverable by the employer are eligible.

Staff costs must be calculated individually for each employee. Staff costs relate to the costs of activities that the relevant partner would not carry out in the absence of the project.

For employees working full time on the project, the total monthly gross employment cost (incl. employer's social contributions) can be claimed. An employee's 100% involvement in the project should be documented either in the employment contract and/ or in another official document issued by the employer.

For Interreg Europe, the staff costs of employees working part-time on the project must be calculated **using a fixed percentage of the gross employment cost**[1] (incl. employer's contributions) in accordance with article 55 (5) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060.

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1. Country specific guidance on how to define and calculate "gross employment costs" may be published on the *Interreg Europe website*.

Example

A	Total monthly salary costs (gross salary and employer's social contributions)	**€5,000**
B	Fixed percentage of time per month for the project	**60%**
C	Eligible costs: (A * B)	**€3,000**

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

The following documents need to be provided to the controller to justify the eligibility of staff costs:

- An employment contract or any other equivalent legal agreement that enables the identification of the employment relationship with the partner's organisation

- A document setting out the percentage of time to be worked on the project per month (it can be the employment contract and/or a 'task assignment letter', see box below for more information).

- A document identifying the real salary costs (gross salary and employer's social contributions for the employee, such as payslips or other accounting documents where the employment costs are clearly detectable)

- Proof of payment

- No separate working time registration ("timesheet") is needed.

Task assignment letter or a document setting out the fixed percentage worked on the project, which usually:

- is issued for the specific employee at the beginning of the period to which it applies

- is dated and signed by the employee and a line manager/ supervisor

- contains the percentage of time dedicated to the project per month and a description of the project-related role, responsibilities, and monthly tasks assigned to the employee in question and which provides sufficient evidence for the time allocation

- Is reviewed (e.g., during the annual staff appraisal) and the percentage and/or description of tasks adjusted, if really needed (e.g., if the role, tasks and/or responsibilities of the employee change).

6.2.2 Office and administrative expenditure

Office and administrative costs cover the general administrative expenses of the partner organisation necessary for the delivery of project activities.

Based on Article 54 (b) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060, office and administrative expenditure must be budgeted and reported as a **flat rate of 15% of each partner's staff costs**.

According to Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 40, office and administrative expenditure is limited to the following items:

- **office rent**

- **insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff are located and to office equipment (e.g., fire, theft insurance)**

- **utilities (e.g., electricity, heating, water)**

- **office supplies (e.g., stationary such as paper, pens etc.)**

- **accounting**

- **archives**

- **maintenance, cleaning, and repairs**

- **security**

- **IT systems (e.g., administration and management of office hard- and software)**

- **communication (e.g., telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards)**

- **bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where the implementation of a project requires a separate account to be opened**

- **charges for transnational financial transactions.**

Example

A	Eligible reported staff costs	**€36,000**
B	Flat rate for office and administrative expenditure	**15%**
C	Eligible reported office and administrative expenditure (automatic reporting without proof of actual costs) (A*B)	**€5,400**

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

Project partners do not need to provide justification or supporting documents for office and administrative expenditure. Nor do they need to document that this expenditure has been incurred and paid or that the flat rate corresponds to reality. The controller's check focuses on the correct reporting of staff costs and that no expenditure covered by the office and administrative cost category is included in any other cost category.

6.2.3 Travel and accommodation

This cost category covers the travel and accommodation costs of staff employed by a project partner. As stated in section 3.2.4 — even if projects are encouraged to also integrate online meetings into their way of working together, in-person exchanges still remain essential to achieve the project's objectives (especially for the main interregional meetings) and partners' participation is expected.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 41, expenditure on travel and accommodation costs is limited to the following items:

(a) travel (such as tickets, travel and car insurance, fuel, car mileage, toll, parking fees)

(b) the cost of meals

(c) accommodation costs

(d) visa costs

(e) daily allowances.

In Interreg Europe, the travel and accommodation costs are calculated:

1) as a **flat rate of 15% of the partner's staff costs**

2) or on a real cost basis, **only** when the flat rate is not an appropriate method for the partner **for justified reasons** (e.g., the project partner comes from an outermost or remote region or from one of the 7 EU candidate countries).

Each project partner will have to indicate their choice between options 1 and 2 in the application form. It will not be possible to change this choice after the signature of the subsidy contract. For the sake of simplification, project partners are asked to choose option 1 (flat rate). If a project partner chooses option 2 (real costs), they must justify why in the application form.

Projects are also encouraged to consider environmental impacts when choosing a mode of transport.

1. Travel costs calculated as a flat rate of 15% of the partner's staff costs

In accordance with Article 41(5) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059, travel and accommodation costs can be budgeted and reported as a **flat rate of 15% of the partner's staff costs.**

With option 1, projects do not need to plan a detailed budget for the 'travel and accommodation' cost category. The application form will automatically calculate a budget corresponding to 15% of the planned staff costs for each partner choosing this option.

When it comes to reporting travel and accommodation expenditure, the flat rate of 15% is automatically applied to the reported eligible staff costs of each project partner concerned.

The flat rate of 15% covers the travel and accommodation costs for all staff employed by the partner organisation, regardless of their department, specific role in the project, or level of involvement in the project's daily tasks.

Example

A	Eligible reported staff costs	€36,000
B	Flat rate for travel and accommodation expenditure	15%
C	Eligible reported travel and accommodation expenditure (automatic reporting without proof of actual costs) (A*B)	€5,400

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

Project partners do not need to provide justification or supporting documents for travel and accommodation costs. Nor do they need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid or that the flat rate corresponds to reality. The controller's check focuses on the correct reporting of staff costs and that no expenditure covered by the travel and accommodation costs category as defined in article 41 (see above) is included in any other cost category (e.g., under external expertise and services).

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2. Travel and accommodation costs calculated on a real cost basis

Travel and accommodation costs can be calculated on a real cost basis where the flat rate method is not appropriate for the partner for justified reasons (e.g., the project partner comes from an outermost or remote region or from one of the 7 EU candidate countries).

Any item listed in points (b) to (e) above and already covered by a daily allowance cannot be reported to the programme in addition to the daily allowance.

Travel and accommodation costs must be borne by the partner organisation. Direct payments by an employee must be supported by proof of reimbursement from the employer.

Project partners must comply with the applicable national and/or internal rules. Real costs and daily allowances must be in line with the specific national or internal rules applicable to the partner organisation.

Usually, travel and accommodation costs should relate to trips undertaken within the programme area. However, trips to places outside the programme area are eligible if they are explicitly mentioned and justified in the application form. Trips outside the programme area that are not detailed in the application form need to be approved by the JS for the related costs to be eligible.

Travel and accommodation expenses related to individuals other than staff directly employed by the project partners (members of the stakeholder groups, staff of associated policy authorities but also consultants or experts), must be included in the 'external expertise and service' cost category.

The travel and accommodation expenses of staff working for partners from countries outside the programme area can be covered by the project partners who are funded directly by the programme and reported under the 'travel and accommodation' cost category of the partner concerned.

CO_2 compensation expenses for travel tickets may be considered eligible travel costs if the CO_2 compensation is directly linked to the trip to the project's event. The CO_2 compensation should be calculated using an official and internationally recognised CO_2 compensation programme (for example the 'Gold Standard').

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

The following documents must be available for control purposes:

- Agendas (or similar) of meetings/ seminars/ conferences

- Documents proving that the journey took place (boarding passes or participant lists etc.)

- Paid invoices (including hotel bills, transport tickets, etc.) and, if applicable, the employee's expense report with proof of reimbursement by the employer to the employee

- Daily allowance claims (if applicable), including proof of reimbursement by the employer to the employee.

6.2.4 External expertise and services

External expertise and service costs include expenditure paid, based on contracts or written agreements, and related invoices or requests for reimbursement to external service providers who are subcontracted to carry out certain tasks or activities linked to delivering the project.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 42, expenditure on external expertise and service are limited to the following services and expertise provided by an organisation other than the project partner:

- **studies or surveys (such as evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks)**

- **training**

- **translations**

- **development, modifications and updates to IT systems and website**

- **promotion, communication, publicity, promotional items and activities or information linked to an project or to a programme as such**

- **financial management**

- **services related to the organisation and implementation of events or meetings (including rent, catering, or interpretation)**

- **participation in events (such as registration fees)**

- **legal consultancy and notarial services, technical and financial expertise, other consultancy and accountancy services**

- **intellectual property rights**

- **verifications pursuant to point (a) of Article 74(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Article 46(1) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 (i.e. cost of expenditure control)**

- **the provision of guarantees by a bank or other financial institution where required by Union or national law or by a programming document adopted by the monitoring committee**

- **travel and accommodation for external experts, speakers, chairpersons of meetings and service providers**

- **other specific expertise and services needed for projects.**

Applicable EU, national, and internal public procurement rules must be respected. Even below EU thresholds, contracts with external providers must comply with the principles of transparency, non-discrimination, equal treatment, and effective competition.

The travel and accommodation costs for the employees of the stakeholder organisations (different from the partner organisations) and for the staff of the associated policy authorities must be budgeted and reported under external expertise costs.

Project partners cannot contract one another within the same project. If a project partner cannot implement a certain task, the task may be reallocated to another partner or procured from an external service provider.

Costs incurred by in-house or affiliated companies (different legal entities from the partner organisation) can be reported under the 'external expertise and services' cost category on a real cost basis, provided there is an actual cash flow between the partner organisation and the in-house company.

Advance payments may only be accepted if they are supported by an invoice or another document of probative value and if they are in line with the standard commercial practices applied in the partner organisation. The corresponding activity must have taken place (and have been verified by the controller) by the end date of the project.

An external expert's office and administration costs are included in the cost category "External expertise and services costs" if they are a part of the expertise contract.

The costs of services contracted by project partners for arranging the travel and accommodation of their own staff members (travel agencies, etc.) must be claimed under the 'travel and accommodation' cost category.

Costs for external expertise and services should not exceed 50% of the total project budget, bearing in mind that those who benefit from the project's activities should be the actual project partners.

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

The following documents must be available for control purposes:

- Evidence of the selection process, in compliance with the applicable EU, national, and internal procurement rules. Any changes to the contract must comply with the applicable procurement rules and must be documented

- A contract or other written agreements of equivalent probative value specifying the services to be provided with a clear link to the project

- An invoice or a request for reimbursement providing all relevant information in line with the applicable accountancy rules

- Proof of payment

- Outputs of the work of external experts or proof of delivery of the external service.

6.2.5 Equipment

Equipment costs include expenditure to finance the purchase, rent, or lease of equipment by a partner and which is necessary to achieve the objectives of the project.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 43, equipment expenditure is limited to the following items:

- **office equipment**

- **IT hardware and software**

- **furniture and fittings**

- **laboratory equipment**

- **machines and instruments**

- **tools or devices**

- **vehicles**

- **other specific equipment needed for projects.**

Considering the nature of Interreg Europe project activities, the focus of this cost category will be on office equipment for project management purposes. Usually, not more than EUR 7,000 of office equipment per project may be budgeted and reported. Specific equipment items may be purchased for pilot actions if needed to achieve their objectives.

The programme strongly recommends that unplanned equipment costs are agreed with the joint secretariat.

It is possible to encounter several different cases for reporting equipment costs:

- The equipment is used solely for the purpose of the project and the cost was incurred and paid within the eligible period: the full purchase cost of the equipment may be reported.

- The equipment is used only partially for the project and the cost was incurred and paid within the eligible period: only the share related to the use of the equipment for the project may be reported. This share must be calculated using a justified and equitable method. For example, if a staff member works on two projects e.g., with an equal share of 50% and uses an item of equipment (e.g., a laptop) equally for both projects, only 50% of the equipment costs may be reported to each project.

- If the equipment was purchased before the project's approval or during the project but the depreciation plan is longer than the project duration: a pro-rata depreciation will be applied in line with the applicable national and internal rules. For example, if a laptop is purchased in the second half of the project, only the share for the remainder of the project may be reported.

- If the equipment is not depreciable (e.g., a low value asset): the full purchase cost of the equipment may be reported.

- If the equipment purchased constitutes an important part of the project's result, the full cost of the item may be reported; even if the item was purchased towards the end of the project. For example, if solar panels are bought as a part of a pilot action implemented in the last year of the project, the full cost of the solar panels may be reported.

Equipment items may only be funded by the programme if no other EU funds have contributed towards financing them. In addition, it is only possible to declare depreciation costs if no public grant has contributed to the purchase of the equipment.

Equipment must be purchased in compliance with the applicable procurement rules. Projects are also encouraged to consider environmental impacts when it comes to purchasing equipment (e.g., purchase of recycled or recyclable equipment or lease of equipment).

The costs of second-hand equipment may be eligible under the following conditions:

   A. no other funding has been received for it from the EU Funds listed in article 1(1) (a) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060

   B. its price does not exceed the generally accepted price on the market for that equipment

   C. it has the technical characteristics necessary for the project and complies with applicable norms and standards.

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

The following documents must be available for control purposes:

   • Evidence of compliance with the applicable EU, national, and internal procurement rules

   • Invoices (or a supporting document with equivalent probative value to invoices, if declaring depreciation costs) providing all relevant information in line with the applicable accountancy rules

   • If applicable: calculation of depreciation in compliance with the applicable national accounting rules and/or calculation of pro-rata use according to a justified and equitable method

   • Proof of payment

   • Proof of existence of the equipment item.

6.2.6 Infrastructure and works (for pilot actions only)

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 44, the eligibility of costs for infrastructure and works is limited to the following:

(a) purchase of land in accordance with point (b) of Article 64(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060

(b) building permits

(c) building material

(d) labour

(e) specialised interventions (such as soil remediation, mine-clearing).

The costs of infrastructure and works are eligible only if they are specifically needed to implement the pilot action. Due to the nature of pilot actions under Interreg Europe, the eligibility of costs for infrastructure and works is usually limited to small scale building materials or labour needed for works (see points c and d above). For example, if a renewable energy project plans to install smart solar benches in public parks as part of a pilot action, the costs related to the works and building materials needed to complete the installation of the benches may be budgeted and reported under this cost category.

These costs are detailed in the application form. Unplanned costs under this cost category will only be eligible for funding in exceptional cases and must be approved by the joint secretariat.

The partners in charge of the infrastructure and construction works are responsible for ensuring that all applicable EU, national, and internal procurement rules are respected.

The full cost of infrastructure and construction works may be reported under this cost category if it is fully justified as part of the project's activities (no depreciation should be applied).

In compliance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 Article 65, there may be no substantial modification of the infrastructure and investments within five years after the project closure date regarding:

- a change in ownership of an item of infrastructure which gives an undue advantage to a firm or a public body

- a substantial change affecting its nature, objectives, or conditions of use which would result in undermining its original objectives.

Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure

The following documents must be available for control purposes:

- Evidence of compliance with the applicable EU, national, and internal procurement rules

- Invoices (or a supporting document with equivalent probative value) providing all relevant information in line with the applicable accountancy rules

- Legal documents specifying the ownership or long-term arrangements for the land and/or buildings where the works will be carried out

- Proof of payment

- Proof of existence of the infrastructure and/or works carried out.

6.3 Preparation costs

In accordance with Article 53 (3) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060, preparation costs are fixed in the form of a **lump sum of EUR 17,500** (or in Interreg / Norwegian funds: EUR 14,000 (80%) for public partners and EUR 8,750 (50%) for Norwegian partners) **for approved projects.** This lump sum covers any costs incurred and paid during the project preparation phase until the date of submission of the application form during the call for proposals.

This amount is automatically included in the lead partner's budget at the application stage. With the first progress report, the EUR 17,500 lump sum for preparation costs will be added to the lead partner's reported expenditure, and the corresponding Interreg / Norwegian funds will be paid by the programme after approval of the progress report.

The lump sum for preparation costs is allocated to the lead partner's budget. Nevertheless, to reflect the partners' involvement in the preparation of the application form in a fair and transparent way the partnership should share the preparation costs. The details of how preparation costs will be shared need to be included in the project partnership agreement.

> **Supporting documents for the verification of expenditure**
>
> Project partners do not need to provide justification or supporting documents for preparation costs. Nor do they need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid or that the expenditure corresponds to reality.

6.4 Other budget and eligibility rules

6.4.1 VAT

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 Article 64 (1) (c) i, VAT is eligible for projects the total cost of which is below EUR 5,000,000 (including VAT).

However, for activities considered state aid relevant and covered by Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 (GBER), VAT on eligible costs or expenses that is refundable under the applicable national tax law cannot be taken into account for calculating aid intensity and eligible costs. Consequently, organisations that can recover VAT cannot report it for state aid relevant activities covered by GBER.

6.4.2 Financing of joint activities

Interreg Europe applies a 'contracting-partner-only-principle' to the budgeting and reporting of the costs related to the activities and tasks that are of common benefit for all project partners (e.g., project management, project dissemination events, etc.). In practice, this means that it is not possible to share the costs of these activities among the project partners. The contracting partner is the only partner which budgets, pays, reports 100% of the cost item of joint benefit and receives the related Interreg funds.

6.4.3 Use of the Euro and exchange rates for partners located outside the Eurozone

All financial reporting and project follow-up will be in euros. Expenditure must be reported to the joint secretariat in euros and the programme will pay all Interreg and Norwegian funds in euros.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 38 (5), expenditure paid in another currency will have to be converted into euros by the partners from countries which have not adopted the Euro as their currency. In these cases, the online monitoring system will automatically apply **the exchange rate of the European Commission which is applicable in the month the partner report is submitted for verification to the controller (in the monitoring system in the [Portal](#)).**

The monthly exchange rates of the Commission are published on:

https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/procedures-guidelines-tenders/information-contractors-and-beneficiaries/exchange-rate-inforeuro_en

6.4.4 Ownership of results and intellectual property rights

As a general principle and in the spirit of cooperation and exchange the Interreg Europe programme expects project results (e.g., studies, policy recommendations, good practice guides) to be made freely available to the public[1]. The European Commission also expects project outputs to be widely disseminated beyond project partners and stakeholders to a broad public so that the reach of their positive impact is maximised. As a logical consequence, any commercial use of project results by the project partner(s) would be in contradiction to the general mission of the programme.

It is nonetheless possible that partnerships will wish to protect their project results from further development and commercial use.

If needed, projects should make use of the project partnership agreement to make the necessary provisions for questions on ownership and intellectual property rights.

6.4.5 Financing activities outside the programme area

The Interreg Europe programme area covers all EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. In principle, all project activities should take place within this programme area. If the project involves a partner from a country outside the programme area, project activities may also take place in this third country partner's territory.

If a project plans to finance activities or events outside the programme area (unrelated to the participation of the third-country partner), this is possible in justified cases. If activities (including travel) or events are planned outside the programme area, the following conditions need to be fulfilled:

- the activity and/or event are for the benefit of all partners, with a focus on the improvement of their regional development policies

- the implementation and/or the relevance of the activity or the event have been approved by the programme.

From experience, the most common activities outside the programme area will involve participation in conferences or events outside the EU, Norway, Switzerland or the 7 EU candidate countries. If project partners wish to participate in such events, an approval by the joint secretariat is necessary. Such activities should preferably already be planned and justified in the application form.

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1. Following this principle and due to the nature of the activities carried out, Interreg Europe projects are not expected to generate revenues.

6.4.6 Ineligible costs

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 Article 38 (3) and Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 Article 64 (1) (a), the following costs are **not eligible**:

- **Gifts**

- **Fines**

- **Financial penalties**

- **Expenditure on legal disputes and litigation**

- **Costs related to foreign exchange rate fluctuations**

- **Interest on debt.**

Interreg Europe does not allow **contributions in kind**, i.e., provision of works, goods, services, land, or real estate for which no cash payment has been made (e.g., unpaid voluntary work). They are therefore **ineligible**.

Staff costs for personnel working in one of the partner institutions with an employment contract and receiving a regular salary do not count as in-kind contributions, but as a cash contribution, since staff costs are actually paid by the partner institution.

Any **expenditure which is already 100% co-financed by another EU-funding source** or a national or regional subsidy **is not eligible** in the context of an Interreg Europe project (double-financing).

Where expenditure is already partially co-financed by national or regional sources, the activities and related costs can only be considered eligible for Interreg Europe if the national or regional subsidy does not exceed the partner's share for that expenditure (20 or 30% depending on the legal status of the partner). In the latter case, the national or regional funding institution must be notified.

In Interreg Europe, costs linked to **awards and prizes** granted or given at competitions organised by the project partners **are not eligible**.

6.5 Public procurement

During the lifetime of a project, virtually all project partnerships will buy goods and services externally. For example, a lead partner or partner may hire external auditors to verify expenditure. They may also hire a project, finance, or communication manager to assist with the organisational and administrative aspects of implementing a project, or they may order catering and technical equipment for conferences and meetings, etc. Whenever purchases are made and contracts are awarded to external suppliers, project partners must be able to demonstrate the good use of public funds. When envisaging such procurement, they will therefore need to consider three sources of rules:

- **the EU public procurement directives**
- **national rules**
- **internal rules of the partner organisation.**

Partners from the 7 EU candidate countries shall comply with the provisions regarding procurement of the Financing Agreement concluded between the relevant EU candidate country, the European Commission and the Managing Authority which will be published on the programme's website under "In my country" section. They may contact their National Contact Point to get informed on the rules to be followed when awarding a contract to an external provider.

As a matter of principle, the strictest rules must always be applied.

The public procurement rules define the tendering and publicity procedures applicable to different threshold values. Each contract should be awarded based on objective criteria which ensure compliance with the principles of transparency, non-discrimination, and equal treatment and guarantee that tenders are assessed under conditions of effective competition.

Project partners should be aware that these fundamental principles also apply to purchases and subcontracted activities below the threshold values. Essentially, the main difference for public contracts of being below or above the threshold values will be the degree of publicity and formality of the tendering procedure: in certain cases, a request for three offers ('bid-at-three') might be sufficient, whereas for others it may be necessary to publish the tender in national/ regional media or on an EU wide website, etc.

In line with green and social public procurement principles, projects are encouraged to include relevant sustainability criteria in their tender documents, whenever relevant, according to the type of services, supplies, and works being procured.

The tender documentation usually consists of the following:

- Terms of reference (sufficiently specified, including clear information to candidates on award and weighting criteria)

- Request for offers or procurement publication/ notice

- Offers/ quotes received

- Report on the assessment of bids (evaluation/ selection report) incl.

    - justification for the procedure chosen in the light of the identified needs

    - evaluation of the offers in the light of the previously announced award and weighting criteria

- Letters of acceptance and rejection

- Contract, including any amendments and/or renewals (with evidence that these did not distort competition in the relevant market' and that there was no modification of the object of the initial contract)

- Evidence that the payments made match the contract (invoices and proof of payment)

- Proof of delivery of goods or services.

Points to note

- Public procurement rules and principles are applicable to EU and Norwegian public authorities and bodies governed by public law and therefore also apply in the context of their participation in an Interreg Europe project. Partners from the 7 EU candidate countries must follow the provisions regarding procurement included in the financing agreement signed by their countries in relation to this programme.

- Private non-profit bodies participating in an Interreg Europe project must also be able to prove how they awarded project-related contracts in compliance with the relevant national rules and guidelines as well as their own internal rules and the principle of sound financial management. The strictest rules apply.

- Project partners must keep evidence available to prove that the choice made regarding publicity requirements (sufficient degree of advertising) complies with relevant rules (depending on the thresholds). Project partners are also required to keep a record of every step of the public procurement procedure for control and audit purposes.

- The greater the interest of the contract to potential bidders from other Partner States, the wider the coverage should be. So, for example, depending on the nature of the services and goods, EU-wide advertising may be required, even if the value of the contract is below the EU-threshold.

- The applicable tendering procedure will vary depending on the contract value. When calculating the value of a contract, the maximum total amount that may be paid during the entire contract period (incl. renewal periods) needs to be estimated.

- When establishing the contract value, the project partner must take into consideration all the (potential) contracts of the same type that the partner organisation has implemented or will implement over a certain period, in accordance with national legislation.

- A procurement procedure may not be divided into several smaller procedures for the purpose of fitting them individually into the value range applicable to direct awarding.

- If a direct award procedure is used for reasons of urgency, it must be proven that the urgency is due to unforeseeable circumstances. Insufficient planning by the project partner does not justify a direct award.

- If a direct award procedure is used for technical/ exclusivity reasons, it must be possible to prove that no supplier, other than the one being contracted, can provide the requested services. The process of excluding other suppliers must be based on objective criteria. For project management services, for example, a direct award procedure for technical reasons/exclusivity cannot usually be justified. The fact of having worked already with a certain external provider in the past, having been satisfied by the quality of their work and wishing to benefit from the knowledge the provider acquired thanks to having worked with the partner organisation in the past and on similar subjects does not represent sufficient justification for a direct award. If objective proofs do not exist, an open tender must still be organised. Its outcome will then prove if there is no equivalent alternative on the market.

- In the event of non-compliance with public procurement rules, financial corrections of up to 100% of the costs may be applied by controllers or auditors (see *Commission guidelines C(2019) 3452 for determining financial corrections to be made to expenditure financed by the Union for non-compliance with the applicable rules on public procurement*).

To avoid any loss of Interreg funds, projects must be able to prove that they have awarded contracts in compliance with public procurement rules. Due to the complexity of these rules, project partners are invited to work closely with their legal department to ensure compliance.

Preventing fraud in public procurement

As highlighted in *section 6.9* below (Interreg Europe anti-fraud policy), Interreg Europe recommends that project partners pay particular attention to fraud risks in the area of public procurement.

In order to prevent and detect potential fraud in this area, the programme recommends that project partners:

- **ensure the proper application of their internal conflict of interest policy (e.g., through conflict-of-interest declarations, conflict registers)**

- **perform checks on companies participating in a tender, to prevent conflicts of interest[1], detect interlinked companies submitting tenders (e.g., checking general websites, online companies registers, etc.)**

- **have measures in place to detect persistently high offers or unusual bid data (e.g., bid evaluators who have a knowledge of the marketplace) and verify the plausibility of the price of activities/services (e.g., comparison with similar contracts, online price comparison tools)**

- **perform checks on the goods and services provided to verify compliance with tender specifications, the prices quoted, and the actual delivery of activities/services (e.g., if needed request additional information on staff involved, time spent, etc.)**

- **use standard unit costs for regularly purchased supplies or services.**

In addition, for all public procurement above the lowest applicable threshold, partners should implement a robust internal control system, in line with the proportionality principle, with a view to avoiding errors or fraud related to:

- **irregular split purchases**
- **unjustified direct awards**
- **irregular extensions of contract**
- **irregular amendments of existing contracts**
- **the leaking of bid data**
- **that bid specifications are too narrow**
- **that procurement procedures are not followed.**

This internal control system should involve the internal review of all public procurement procedures above relevant applicable thresholds. For example, it is considered good practice to have a secondary mechanism other than the selection panel within the partner organisation (e.g., senior level personnel within the beneficiary) to review contract awards or amendments to existing contracts. Alternatively, partners could set up evaluation boards comprised of senior management personnel who are rotated, with some level of randomness in their selection for participation.

Similarly, if the partner organisation has an established internal audit function, the relevant service/ person should consider regularly reviewing the implementation of internal controls over procurement.

Moreover, on top of the minimum requirements laid down by the applicable procurement laws, it is also recommended to ensure:

- **a high level of transparency in the award of contracts (e.g., publication of all contract information that is not publicly sensitive)**

- **that the tender process includes a transparent bid opening process and adequate security arrangements for unopened tenders (in order to avoid the manipulation of bid data).**

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1. According to article 24 of the, European Directive on Public Procurement (EU) 2014/24, "the concept of conflicts of interest shall at least cover any situation where staff members of the contracting authority or of a procurement service provider acting on behalf of the contracting authority who are involved in the conduct of the procurement procedure or may influence the outcome of that procedure have, directly or indirectly, a financial, economic or other personal interest which might be perceived to compromise their impartiality and independence in the context of the procurement procedure." See also national rules transposing the Directive (EU) 2014/24 into national law and the provisions of the financing agreement signed by each of the 7 EU candidate countries.

6.6 Accounting for project expenditure

Expenditure can only be reported if the following principles are respected[1]:

- **The calculation is based on actual costs**

- **The costs are borne by the partner and would not have arisen without the project**

- **The expenditure has been paid out before the end of the reporting period. Expenditure is paid when the amount is debited from the partner institution's bank account. The payment is usually proven by bank statements. The dates when the invoice was issued, recorded, or booked in the accounting system do not count as the payment date**

- **The expenditure is directly linked to the project and necessary for successful implementation.**

Both the lead partner and other project partners must ensure that all accounting documentation related to their project is available and filed separately, even if this leads to a dual treatment of accounts (for example, if the usual accounting management requires central filing, a copy should also be kept in a separate file to allow quick access to the project's supporting documents).

In the context of the project, an overview of the amounts reported must exist in computerised form. It must be possible to clearly identify which expenditure has been allocated to and reported by the project and to ensure that expenditure is not reported twice (in two different cost categories, reporting periods, projects/funding schemes). This clear identification is ensured through:

- **a separate accounting system or**

- **an adequate accounting code for all expenditure relating to the project.**

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1. These principles do not apply if the costs reimbursed based on a flat rate.

6.7 Verification of expenditure to be reported

Before submission to the joint secretariat, each progress report must be verified and confirmed by an independent controller in compliance with the control system set up by each EU Member State, each of the 7 EU candidate countries and Norway (in accordance with Article 74 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 and Article 46 (3) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059).

The main aim of the control is to verify that the project is delivered and that costs co-financed under the Interreg Europe programme are accounted for and claimed in accordance with the provisions of the subsidy contract, the approved application form, as well as with programme rules, national rules, and EU regulations.

▶

Watch our video

Tutorials on the Portal for controllers

6.7.1 Designation of the controller

In accordance with Article 46 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059, it is the responsibility of each EU Member State, each of the 7 EU candidate countries and Norway to designate as controller either a national or regional authority or a private body or a natural person. The designated controllers are responsible for verifying that the expenditure declared by each partner participating in a project complies with the applicable law and the programme rules and that the funded products and services were delivered and paid. In practice, this means that each partner must seek confirmation of the reported expenditure from a controller who is authorised by the respective EU Member State, the respective EU candidate country or Norway.[1] The description of the control system put in place for each EU Member State, each of the 7 EU candidate countries and Norway and any country specific control requirements can be found on the programme's website.

The main principle is that the controllers must be independent and qualified to carry out the control of project expenditure. In order to be considered independent, the controllers must fulfil certain criteria. An internal controller, if authorised by the EU Member State, one of the 7 EU candidate countries or Norway, must belong to a unit which is organisationally separated from the units dealing with project activities and finances. An external controller can only be considered independent if there are no other contractual relationships with the project or partner organisation that could lead to a conflict of interest.

Article 46 (9) of Regulation No 2021/1059 requires that when the control is carried out by a private body or natural person, the controller must meet at least one of the following requirements:

(a) be a member of a national accounting or auditing body or institution, which in turn is a member of International Federation of Accountants (IFAC)

(b) be a member of a national accounting or auditing body or institution without being a member of IFAC, but committing to carry out the management verifications in accordance with IFAC standards and ethics

(c) be registered as a statutory auditor in the public register of a public oversight body in a Member State in accordance with the principles of public oversight set out in Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on statutory audits of annual accounts and consolidated accounts

(d) be registered as a statutory auditor in the public register of a public oversight body in a third country or partner state, provided this register is subject to principles of public oversight set out in the legislation of the country concerned.

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1. Each partner state is responsible for controls carried out on its territory. If a partner registered on the territory of partner state 'A' incurs expenditure that is verifiable only on the territory of partner state 'B', the controller of the partner in Partner State 'A" must be assisted by a controller authorized in line with the control system applicable in partner state 'B' to carry out the verification on the territory of partner state 'B'.
This particular case must be brought to the attention of the JS as soon as the partner becomes aware of this and before the costs are incurred. The JS will then inform the relevant partner states and seek their agreement. This case could arise eg. in the case of an EGTC registered in partner state 'A' and employing a staff member based on an employment contract covered by the law of partner state 'A', but whose workplace is in partner state 'B'. In this case salary payments may have to made via a tax office in partner state 'B' and payslips and other supporting documents would also be in the language of partner state 'B'. The control therefore requires the participation of two controllers. The cost for both controllers would be an eligible cost.

Specific information or requirements (notably for Norwegian partners' controllers) may exist and will be published on the programme website.

When selecting their controller, partners also need to bear in mind that the task of controlling project expenditure co-financed under the Interreg Europe programme goes beyond checking the accounts; it also involves a judgment on the compliance with ERDF, national, and programme rules. The controllers are therefore expected to master the requirements for project expenditure control under the Structural Funds regulations.

Controllers also need to have a good command of English given that all programme documents (including the partner report, control report, and checklist) are in English.

In addition, if a project partner wishes to appoint an external controller, (in compliance with country specific requirements), this controller must be selected in accordance with applicable procurement rules.

In principle, there are four general types of control models[1]:

- centralised control at Partner State level through a public administrative body

- centralised control at Partner State level through a private audit firm

- decentralised control through controllers from a central shortlist

- decentralised control through an internal or external controller selected by the project partner and approved by the Partner State.

Control systems

centralised

public controller

private controller

decentralised

short list

chosen by partner and approved by approbation body

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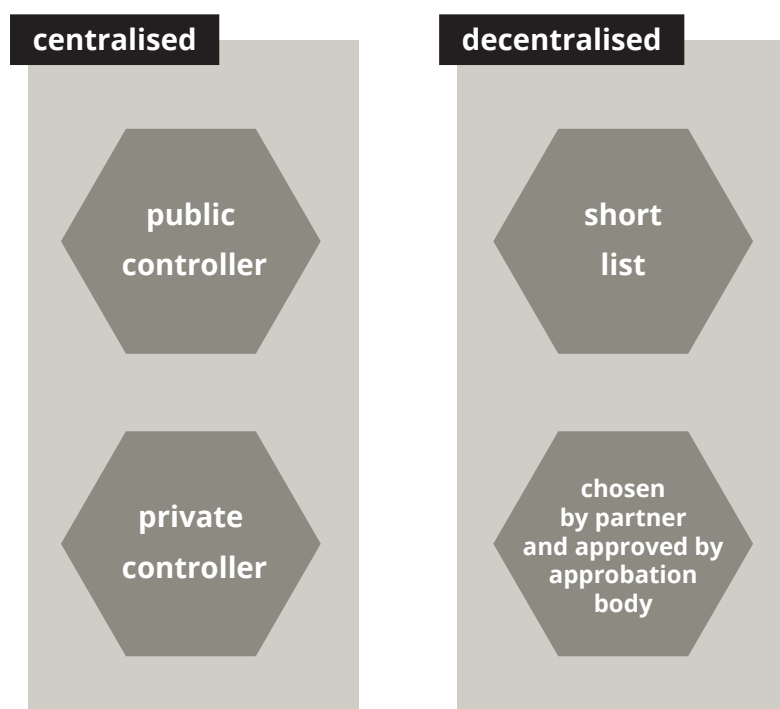
1. *In some Partner States mixed systems exist.*

In Partner States with decentralised control systems, each selected controller must be designated in the programme _Portal_ **by the approbation body appointed by the Partner State.**

The detailed control system description and requirements per country can be found in the section 'in my country – control information' on the Interreg Europe website.

6.7.2 Role of the controller

The controllers' task is to verify that the expenditure reported by the partners in each report fulfils the following conditions:

- the costs are eligible in line with the different sources of rules mentioned in _section 6.1_ of the programme manual (European, programme, national, and internal rules)

- the conditions of the programme, approved application form and subsidy contract have been observed and followed

- the invoices and payments are correctly recorded (through separate accounting records or appropriate accounting codes for the project) and sufficiently justified by supporting documents

- the related activities, sub-contracted supplies and services are in progress or have been delivered or carried out

- the EU and national rules have been respected, especially on information and publicity, public procurement, state aid, and horizontal principles of gender equality, non-discrimination, and sustainable development.

The controller must be familiar with the content of the following documents in order to be able to confirm the compliance with the provisions they contain:

- the EU applicable regulations and directives, notably:

    - Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation)

    - Regulation (EU) No 2021/1058 (ERDF Regulation)

    - Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 (European Territorial Cooperation Regulation)

    - EU Directives on public procurement / the provisions on procurement included in the financing agreement signed by each of the 7 EU candidate countries regarding their participation in this programme.

- further national rules and guidance (e.g., national public procurement rules)

- the Interreg Europe programme manual

- the application form

- the subsidy contract

- the project partnership agreement.

The application form and the subsidy contract, including any amendments to these documents will be available and accessible to the controllers in the online monitoring system. The lead partner and project partners will be responsible for making the project partnership agreement (including any amendments) available to the controller.

The partner report must be submitted to the authorised controller electronically in the _Portal_. Each authorised controller is granted access to this online system and must use it to electronically certify the partner report.

The programme has designed standard templates to provide guidelines for the controllers during their control work to ensure the application of the same quality standards everywhere and to document the control steps properly:

- A standard control certificate (see appendix 03)

- A standard control report template including a control checklist, which must be filled in by the project partner's controller (see appendix 03).

The standard templates mentioned above, in electronic format, are part of the partner report certified by the controller in the online system.

These templates have been developed in a joint approach between European territorial cooperation programmes in order to bring greater harmonisation and were approved by the Interreg Europe programme's monitoring committee. The text of the templates cannot therefore be amended or extended.

Furthermore, the control report (incl. control checklist) template provides the minimum requirements for the controllers' checks and documentation, meaning those templates must be filled in and completed for each progress report by the controller in the _Portal_. Additional documents (e.g., documentation of checks based on national rules) may be used by the controller, but do not have to be submitted to the programme.

Article 74 (2) of Regulation No 2021/1060 indicates that verifications "_shall be risk-based and proportionate to the risks identified ex ante and in writing_". The programme risk-based control methodology[1] is provided on the programme website _here._

In the case of simplified costs options (i.e., the flat rate for administration costs, the flat rate for travel costs, and the lump sum for preparation costs), controllers are not expected to check the reality of such costs themselves (no supporting documents need to be provided). In these cases, the controller only needs to verify that the project partner has complied with the programme rules (e.g., for administration costs, that the presented staff costs are correctly calculated, an amount corresponding to 15% of staff costs is reported as administration costs, and no administration costs are reported in any other cost category). It is inherent in such fixed rates that they may result in an amount that is higher or lower than the costs actually incurred in relation to the project.

Verifying the delivery of services, goods, and work & carrying out on-the-spot checks

Controllers must verify that:

- the reported activities have taken place

- the delivery of sub-contracted supplies, work, and goods is in progress or has been completed.

These tasks can be performed by the controller through administrative verifications (desk checks) or through on-the-spot verifications (on-the-spot checks).

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1. The programme methodology has been approved by the Monitoring Committee as a minimum requirement. If a further analysis specific to Interreg Europe is carried out by the PS and reveals additional risks, additional requirement may apply and will be published on the programme's website. under "in my country section".

What, typically, will an on-the-spot check look at?

Typically, the Interreg Europe programme supports activities such as meetings, seminars, studies, good practice guides, etc. This mainly generates costs related to staff, administration, external expertise, and travel (the financing of heavy investment or major equipment items does not apply in Interreg Europe projects).

In this context, on-the-spot checks usually focus on two parameters, which can help to ensure that the project is being properly managed:

1. The good functioning of internal processes and systems related to the approval, ordering, accounting, and payment of reported costs.

    An on-the-spot check gives a better understanding of the supporting documents, the project, and the partner organisation. Interviews and walk-throughs can be conducted, for example, which means that processes can be traced from beginning to end at the partner organisation's premises and with the people responsible. The focus may, for example, be on public procurement processes, from the launch of the tender to the selection, contracting, and final delivery of the contract or on a payment process from the ordering of the service to its delivery, invoicing, registration in the accounting system, and final payment. Moreover, original documents (e.g., invoices) can be readily accessed.

2. The existence and delivery of goods and services & infrastructure and works

    The staff working on the project can be met. Outputs such publications, equipment items, etc. can be reviewed in more depth. The reality of infrastructure and works and their compliance with the application form and invoices can be checked.

    Supporting documents such as staff contracts, bank statements as payment proofs, and procurement documents can be accessed and reviewed more easily.

Where can on-the-spot checks take place?

Due to the nature of Interreg Europe's activities, "on-the-spot checks" can be organised:

*   at the partner's premises

*   on the occasion of a project event/meeting

*   at the place of the project's physical output.

On-the-spot checks may be performed remotely, i.e., via an online visit/meeting, via a virtual check and/or other suitable means. This choice should be explained in the relevant control report.

In projects where partners report equipment and/ or infrastructure & works costs related to a pilot action and considering that verifications are now risk-based, at least one "on-the-spot check" (done on-the-spot, not virtually) should be carried out during the project lifetime. On-the-spot checks are of added value particularly in these cases because they facilitate checks on the equipment or works delivered. As a result, it is recommended that controllers carry out on-the-spot checks only for projects with a pilot action which includes reported equipment/infrastructure costs[1].

Based on their professional judgement, the controller can however decide to carry out an on-the-spot check for a project not reporting pilot equipment/infrastructure costs, if they deem that it has an added value for their check (e.g. in case of suspicion of fraud, issues with the partner reporting / understanding of requirements, doubts about the proper functioning of internal processes, etc.).

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1. Stricter national requirements for "on-the-spot" checks may exist. Please check the programme website "in my country" section.

6.7.3 The role of the lead partner in the control process

In line with the lead partner principle, as laid down in article 26 (1) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059, the lead partner assumes responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the entire project. When submitting a joint progress report, the lead partner must:

- "ensure that the expenditure reported by the partners has been paid in implementing the project and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners", i.e., it is in line with the application form and subsidy contract

- check that any deviations from the application form, should they exist, have been properly described and justified in the progress report

- check that amounts and activities reported are correctly included in the joint progress report and that they give a correct description of the implementation and present status of the project

This does not imply re-performing the checks already carried out at partner level, given the fact that financial control is a Partner State responsibility. However, it is still up to the lead partner, due to its role and understanding of the whole project, to satisfy themselves that partners are reporting correctly by looking through the information available to them (partner report and outputs, control report (including control checklist), list of expenditure). Where there is any doubt, the lead partner must clarify the matter with the partner (and the relevant controller) before the cost item is included in the joint progress report that is submitted to the joint secretariat.

6.7.4 Timing of the control

The project (through the lead partner) is required to submit the progress report within three months after the end of each reporting period (see *section 5.2,* Reporting). Project expenditure must therefore be verified within this timeframe. In order to ensure timely submission, the controls at project partner and lead partner levels need to be scheduled carefully in relation to the submission deadlines.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind that;

- expenditure needs to be reported regularly, i.e., during the reporting period in which it is incurred

- the project partner's controller can only carry out the control after receipt of all the documents from the partners

- some project partner controllers may fix time limits for carrying out the control, which must be respected when the partner report and the relevant documentation is submitted to the controller (and time limits for potential clarifications)

- the lead partner can only submit the progress report after receiving and checking the partner reports from the partners reporting expenditure.

Given the points above and the complexity of reporting procedures, it is crucial that projects establish a clear timeline for the reporting procedure. Interreg Europe recommends that:

- within two weeks after the end of the reporting period project partners submit the partner report to the controller, including relevant supporting documents. Point to note: in many countries with a centralized control system, the verification is carried out on a first come, first served basis. Hence for those partners, it is obviously important to submit documents shortly after the end of a reporting period. Towards the end of a reporting period partners should already have established a timeline with their controllers, in order to avoid any bottlenecks.

- after receipt of the partner report and content input from the partners, the lead partner has sufficient time remaining to compile the progress report and, in cooperation with the partners, clarify any open points or questions in the reports. As a final step, the lead partner submits the progress report to the programme.

Finally, Interreg Europe recommends that, where decentralised systems are in place, the lead partner ensures the timely selection of controllers by partners, in compliance with country specific requirements, in order to ensure that delays in the selection and approbation process do not lead to delays in reporting and controlling costs.

6.7.5 Control costs

Control costs for the verification of expenditure are considered eligible unless there are stricter national rules established at partner state level. Projects should therefore earmark a budget for these controls depending on the control arrangements applicable in the relevant Partner States (EU Member States, the 7 EU candidate countries and Norway) for each of the project partners; this point should be carefully checked in the specific-country requirements available on the Interreg Europe website.

Points to note:

- Internal control should be included under the cost category 'staff'.
  For example, if the accounting department of a regional authority is designated as the controller in accordance with applicable requirements and carries out the control for the environment department of the regional authority, the expenditure would be reported under the cost category for staff costs, in accordance with applicable rules for staff costs, because the person(s) carrying out the verification is/are on the payroll of the partner institution.

- The expenditure for an external controller should be reported in the cost category 'external expertise and services'. For example, the environment department of a regional authority subcontracts an external controller, in compliance with the relevant public procurement regulations. As this controller is not directly employed by the partner institution, the expenditure must be reported in the cost category 'external expertise and services'.

For the control costs for the last progress report to be eligible, **the activity** (control) must be carried out **AND the payment must** be made before the official end date of the project. For further information please see *section 5.4.1* (project closure).

6.7.6 Financial corrections and recovery procedure

Projects must carry out and document a financial correction if expenses were previously wrongly declared in a progress report approved by the joint secretariat.

In order to do that, projects need to create the financial correction report in the Portal.

In such a scenario, the project should immediately get in touch with the joint secretariat to discuss the next steps.

Should the programme, EU, or national bodies become aware of any unduly paid out funds, or if the managing authority is notified of such a case, the managing authority/JS will also request projects to implement corrections.

Whenever possible, the amount to be corrected will be deducted from the following progress report. If the partner affected by the error does not report costs in their following report, but there is an open claim by the same partner in another project progress report, the possibility of recovering the amount from this other project may be considered.

The correction may also be deducted from the payment due to the lead partner, even if the partner affected by the error does not report costs in the following project progress report. The lead partner will then request the reimbursement of the amount at stake to the project partner, based on the partnership agreement. If the partner does not reimburse the lead partner in due time. this request must be followed up with a reminder.

If it is not possible to deduct the undue amount from an open progress report (eg. if the project is closed) or if the MA/JS deems it necessary (eg. if waiting for the next progress report puts at risk the recovery of the due amount), a letter will be sent to the lead partner to request the reimbursement of this amount to the programme within one month (4 weeks). Based on this letter and the partnership agreement, the lead partner should immediately send a request to the partner concerned, asking them to reimburse them within a maximum of 3 weeks. It is of utmost importance that the lead partner follows this timeline closely and that they make sure that it is respected by the partner concerned. If after 3 weeks, the partner has not reimbursed the LP, the LP must send them a reminder giving them one more week to make the reimbursement.

If, despite their efforts, the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from the partner, or if the managing authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner, then, in accordance with article 52 of the ETC Regulation, the Member State or third country on whose territory the partner concerned is located (or in case of an EGTC, is registered), shall reimburse the Managing Authority any amounts unduly paid to that partner. This Member State or third country is then entitled to claim this amount from the partner concerned based on its national law.

6.8 Audits / Sample checks on projects

Every year, between 2024 and 2030, sample audits on projects will be carried out to verify that projects have declared expenditure correctly in their progress reports. These audits will be performed under the responsibility of the programme's audit authority, assisted by a group of auditors with at least one representative from each EU Member State and each of the 7 EU candidate countries. The actual audits will be sub-contracted and carried out by a private audit firm. The purpose of these audits is to detect mistakes in the accounting records at the level of individual projects and, on that basis, to obtain an overall picture of whether the management and control procedures and documents set up at programme level are being applied and that they assure the prevention and correction of potential weaknesses and errors.

Should a project be selected for a sample audit (or any other audit or check), the lead partner and other partners must cooperate with the auditing bodies and present any documentary evidence or information deemed necessary to assist with the evaluation of the accounting documents. They must also give access to their business premises if requested to do so by the auditors.

In addition to the sample audits explained above, other bodies, such as the European Commission's audit services, the European Court of Auditors, national bodies or the Interreg Europe managing authority/ joint secretariat may carry out audits / sample checks to verify the quality of the programme and project implementation and in particular their financial management and compliance with EU and national rules. Projects may be audited or checked even after the project has ended. It is therefore important to ensure good documentation and the secure conservation of all project documents at least until the end of the EU and national archiving periods (see *section 5.4* on project closure).

6.9 Interreg Europe anti-fraud policy

The managing authority has a zero-tolerance policy to fraud.

The EU treaty defines fraud, in respect of expenditure, as an intentional act or omission related to:

- **the use or presentation of false, incorrect, or incomplete statements or documents, which leads to the misappropriation or wrongful retention of funds from the EU**

- **non-disclosure of information in violation of a specific obligation, with the same effect**

- **the misapplication of such funds for purposes other than those for which they were originally granted.**

Interreg Europe is strongly committed to preventing and detecting cases of fraud[1]. For this reason, the programme has robust control systems, measures, and procedures and will follow-up on all cases of suspected fraud. We also encourage all parties involved, including partners, controllers, and contractors, to do their utmost to prevent fraud, to put in place proportionate measures to detect it, and to come forward with any suspicion of fraud in relation to the programme.

A specific programme template is available to controllers (see appendix 04 of the programme manual) to assist them with reporting cases of suspected or established fraud to the programme.

A whistleblowing procedure is also in place to allow partners and members of the public to report any suspicion of fraud to the managing authority, by sending an email to a dedicated email address. This email address is published on the programme's website under the section dedicated to the programme's anti-fraud policy. It should be noted that this whistleblowing procedure does not replace any national legal action that may be introduced in parallel (for instance, a potential contractor may consider taking legal action to request the cancellation of a public procurement procedure that is considered irregular or fraudulent). This procedure has no effect on the time limits for such legal action.

Interreg Europe recommends that project partners and controllers pay particular attention to staff costs (e.g., plausibility of staff costs considering the activities performed, risk of double financing) and public procurement (e.g., potential conflict of interest, contract splitting - see also *section 6.5,* Public procurement) as they have been identified as the two highest risk areas for irregularities and fraud in Interreg Europe. This is the reason why the control checklist tackles fraud risks in these areas. The programme and national authorities as well as the EU or programme auditors may also carry out targeted verifications of project partners to identify potential risks of irregularities or fraud. These verifications may also be performed[2]

Further recommendations to prevent fraud in public procurement are detailed in *section 6.5* (Public procurement).

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1. "The term fraud is commonly used to describe a wide range of misconducts including theft, corruption, embezzlement, bribery, forgery, misrepresentation, collusion, money laundering and concealment of material facts. It often involves the use of deception to make a personal gain for oneself, a connected person or a third party, or a loss for another - intention is the key element that distinguishes fraud from irregularity." (EGESIF_14-0021-00 - Guidance on "Fraud Risk Assessment and Effective and Proportionate Anti-Fraud Measures")

2. Information on ARACHNE risk scoring tool can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=325&intPageId=3587&langId=en

7. Communication

Communication plays an important role in ensuring the success of EU funded projects. In the context of interregional cooperation, there are several reasons for this:

- the European institutions (the European Commission in particular) wish to demonstrate to the wider public how European funds are spent

- the public authorities involved in projects need to show the added-value of allocating resources to cooperation and how they use public funds more efficiently as a result

- Interreg Europe's result-oriented approach also requires the less tangible, but no less effective policy results to be visible.

Therefore, project partners must dedicate sufficient time and resources to project communication at all stages of the project. They need to approach communication as a strategic project tool, which is instrumental in achieving their project's objectives. Communication cannot simply be an 'add-on' at the end of the project. Each project partnership must draw up a project communication strategy, defining a specific mix of tools and activities in support of their project's objectives.

EU Regulations and Interreg Europe define several transparency and communication requirements which projects must respect.

This chapter describes these requirements. It provides guidance and templates to help projects turn project communication into a tool that helps projects to achieve their main goal(s), and ultimately to inform the general public in all the partner regions of Interreg Europe's achievements.

7.1 Drawing up a project communication strategy

A project's communication strategy should set out how communication will help it to achieve its overall objectives. The strategy should identify how the project will reach those who need to be reached and what they need to hear to ensure the project is a success. It is a roadmap that should serve the project throughout its lifetime.

It is also important to explain through communication that the project is part of a bigger picture as it is co-financed by the European Union's Interreg Europe. The Interreg Europe programme has its own communication strategy and projects are expected to contribute to the programme's communication efforts. These can be consulted in Chapter 5 of the Cooperation Programme, which sets out the programme communication strategy with its objectives, target groups, channels, and evaluation methodology.

7.1.1 Developing a communication strategy

The project's communication strategy is an important part of the application form. Partners should invest time in defining and refining their project communication strategy before submitting their project proposal. The project communication strategy should briefly describe the following:

- **the objectives of the communication strategy**

- **the project's target groups**

- **the main communication tools and channels to be used, including social media**

- **how the communication strategy will be implemented and evaluated.**

The project's workplan should describe the communication activities planned for each semester in detail. They should be consistent with the project's other activities.

Define communication objectives that contribute to project objectives

Communication needs to be goal-driven. It is therefore important to distinguish between project objectives and communication objectives; the former determine the latter.

The starting point for project partners is to determine what they want to achieve or change. What policies do they want to improve? The question is then: What do we need to communicate to bring this improvement about?

Communication objectives for policy-learning projects can be, for example, related to:

- raising awareness

- changing behaviour or mindset

- disseminating knowledge.

The **communication objectives** will describe how communication can help to deliver project objectives.

As Interreg Europe projects aim to change policy, action to change behaviour focussing on policymakers, will be particularly relevant.

Communication objectives need to be **SMART**, which stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. They could, for example, serve to inform public policy on a particular topic, to change the opinion of certain stakeholders, or to raise public awareness about a specific issue.

SMART

A SMART overall project objective could, for example, be:

"Increase business creation among young people in the participating regions by 10 start-ups per region on average by 2027, thanks to modified policy instruments in each region address-ing the issue."

A related **communication objective** could be:

"Persuade policymakers that youth entrepreneurship remains a political priority (sign action plan detailing willingness to implement change – 5 signed by 2026)."

S – Specific   Among young people/ youth entrepreneurship

M – Measurable   Increase by 10 start-ups on average per region/ 5 action plans signed

A – Achievable   Through modifying policy instruments/ by persuading policymakers

R – Realistic   Increase business creation/sign the action plans

T – Time-bound   By 2027/ by 2026

If a partnership wishes to be more ambitious, it might try to make its communication objectives **FAST** (frequently discussed, ambitious, specific, and transparent).

FAST

A **FAST** objective is:

F – frequently discussed = embedded in ongoing discussions which review progress, focused on what matters most, evaluated, and then corrected depending on progress

A – ambitious = objectives are difficult but not impossible to achieve

S – specific = objectives are translated into concrete metrics and milestones (SMART)

T – transparent = the objectives and current performance are available for all to

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Point to note: It is important to include the project's plans for internal communication when defining the overall communication strategy.

Identify target groups

A project's key audiences are its 'target groups'. Target groups can easily be identified by drawing up a list of important people and organisations who need to know about the project and its work for the project to succeed.

Examples of well-defined target groups could be "politicians and public officials dealing with innovation management", "regional business support organisations", or "public transport authorities". However, "EU", "politicians", and "academic institutions" are **not sufficiently specific**.

The list may be quite long, so grouping and analysing the people and organisations according to their characteristics and needs will help in deciding which to target, how, and when. It is useful to use a 'stakeholder analysis' grid (see figure below) to place the different groups according to their current level of engagement/ interest in the issue tackled by a project (axis x), and their ability to influence the outcome of the project (axis y).

Institutions in the Key Players segment will be the priority target group. Projects should also try to increase the interest and engagement of any individual or organisation able to positively influence their project's outcomes.
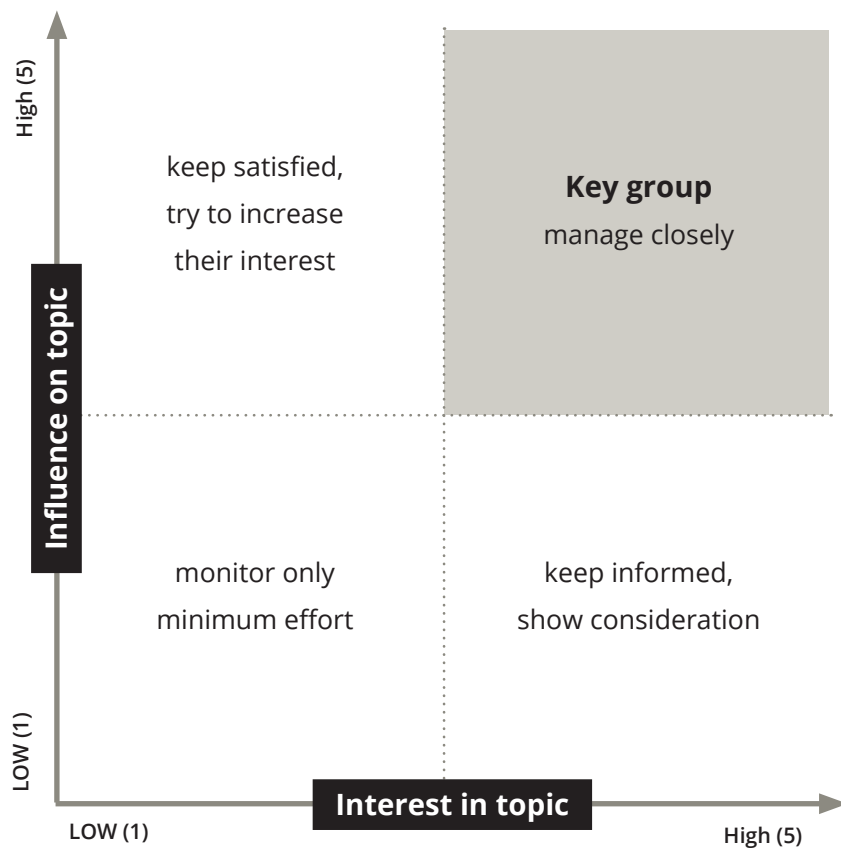
Use an appropriate mix of communication tools and channels

What is the best way to transmit a particular message to a given target group? Would a brochure, conference, or video be best?

It is useful to list any preferred but especially the most appropriate communication channels and tools for each target group. A range of channels will probably be needed to achieve the project's communication objectives. Depending on the target group, social media channels may be worth considering.

Projects must include the tools and channels required by the programme – these are the project website and the promotional poster (see more details in 7.1.2 & 7.2.1 below).

Communication tools may include written material such as newsletters, email alerts, press releases and promotional brochures, and events such as large conferences, networking lunches, thematic workshops, and regional seminars.

The programme has a strict approach to promotional 'gadgets' or 'giveaways'. **Only communication material specifically required for reaching one of the defined target groups and objectives may be produced.** The use of any such publicity material will need the prior approval of the joint secretariat.

Plan implementation and evaluation

The project communication strategy should briefly describe how it will be implemented and how progress against objectives will be evaluated during the project's lifetime. It should describe how partners will allocate or share responsibilities for the different communication tasks and activities and for the overall coordination of communication work.

Partners also need to decide and describe how the results of the different communication activities will be measured and how the partnership will know if communication objectives have been reached. In this regard, partners should establish appropriate communication result indicators which they can track internally throughout their project's lifetime.

By tracking internal indicators partnerships will be able to assess whether the selected communication approach and activities are bringing about the intended results and whether they are helping the project to achieve its goals. Interreg Europe will provide projects with advice on evaluation methods.

The progress of the communication strategy will be one of the topics discussed during the midterm project review (see *section 5.2.3* on monitoring).

Draw up a schedule of activities

In the application form's work plan (part E) partners should outline an indicative schedule for the project's communication activities, in line with the project's overall milestones.

Interreg Europe expects the partnership to approach the two project phases differently:

- During the core phase, the communication strategy should focus on informing and engaging all the relevant target groups who can help the project to successfully improve the selected policy instruments.

- During the follow-up phase, project communication should inform the public about the project's achievements, which the project should present at an event with high-level political participation to illustrate policymakers' active involvement in the project's work.

Summary of the approach to communication in the application form

Please note that it is important to draw up the communication strategy before the application stage. Section C.6 of the application form asks applicants to present a brief overview of the communication strategy including the communication objectives, related target groups, main communication tools and channels, and the approach to implementing and evaluating the strategy.

7.1.2 Project branding and visibility rules

Interreg Europe has developed branding for projects based on a harmonised approach for all Interreg programmes. This branding is instrumental to consolidating the achievements of all Interreg Europe projects and increasing the visibility of Interreg at the same time.

Interreg Europe projects must therefore follow those branding guidelines when developing their project communication tools and materials. The guidelines are included in a communication toolkit developed by the programme. The toolkit includes:

- **Project branding guidelines**

- **Main project visual consisting of the Programme logo and project acronym**

- **Project poster template**

- **Project plaque/ billboard template**

- **Project PowerPoint template**

- **Project website**

- **Project social media template.**

Please note that if the visibility and publicity requirements described below are not observed or only partly observed, the related costs incurred may be considered ineligible for Interreg funds.

In addition, in accordance with paragraph 6 of Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/ 1059, the managing authority may, taking into account the principle of proportionality, **cancel up to 2 % of the support from the funds** awarded to any beneficiary who fails to comply with their obligations on transparency and communication.

Project branding

Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 (Chapter III, Article 47) requires all beneficiaries to use the emblem of the Union in accordance with Annex IX when carrying out visibility, transparency, and communication activities. The EU logo must always be visible in a prominent place (on the first/landing page, visible, without scrolling, on all electronic and mobile devices) and be of a comparable size to other logos used.

Please check with the relevant national point of contact for the programme if there are any additional national publicity requirements to comply with.

Interreg Europe's main project visual complies with all Regulations and programme requirements. All approved projects are obliged to **use it on all their communication materials** (both hard copy and electronic) intended for the public or for participants in their project activities.

Projects will receive their main visual from the programme once their project has been formally approved (see example below). Projects are requested not to design their own project logo.

Information about Interreg Europe's programme branding for use by projects is available on the programme website: www.interregeurope.eu

Project acronym

A key component of a project's branding is its acronym. It is important, if possible, to decide on an acronym that is short, easy to pronounce and associated with the project's theme. Project acronyms should be max. 18 characters long and entirely in capital letters (as in the logo example above).

The project acronym will be used to create the project website's url (see next paragraph) so the acronym must not contain special characters (& ! . * etc).

Project website

Interreg Europe hosts all project websites and their use is mandatory for each project. They are an integral part of the programme's website: www.interregeurope.eu.

Project websites will convey a mix of information drawn directly from the *Portal* (from the application form), such as the descriptions of the project and its partnership, information about financing, and will also include sections which each project can customise, including adding extra pages or sub-pages, buttons, and links to external tools.

A standard project website map will contain:

Home button/ About project section which includes:

Project summary field

Budget & duration details

Partnership/partner locations on interactive map

Details of the policy instruments addressed

Pilot actions (when relevant)

News section

Events section

Good practices (if any submitted)

Library section

Contact us section with a possibility to link people to the project

Extra page(s) (with up to 2 pages, sub-level)

Examples of project websites from previous programmes can be found by consulting the Interreg Europe 'Approved projects' section: http://www.interregeurope.eu/discover-projects/

The project partnership will be responsible for editing and updating their website. Administrator rights can be allocated to one or more users from the project. Project website administrators will be required to become members of the Interreg Europe community, as the website is administered via the 'front end' of the Interreg Europe website. Websites should be updated at least **once every six months**.

The programme expects projects to update their websites with high-quality visual content illustrating their activities, with a focus on achievements. Online communication has become largely visual, using photos and videos instead of long texts. To make the project websites and communication attractive to online users, the use of high-quality visuals has become essential.

Promotional material

As they get up and running, each project must provide the programme with at least **one high-quality photo** for the project website. This will be used to illustrate the project's theme and work. Other visuals should present the good practices identified by the project and the project's achievements.

Each project is also expected to produce at least **two short videos**: one presenting the project at its inception and another presenting the project's achievements towards its end.

Each video should:

- be short (up to 3 minutes)

- use material which is copyright free or which the project has the right to use

- be useful to all project partners

- not exceed costs of 5,000 euros per video.

Projects may produce additional videos about their activities and achievements. If they wish to do so, they must be described, justified, and budgeted in the application form.

Each project is expected to share their achievements, making sure to include input from each region or project partner involved in a **ppt presentation format or similar** on their project website. This presentation should be updated regularly to reflect the latest policy changes achieved, ideally following the approval of each progress report.

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 2021/ 1060 (Chapter III, Section II, Article 49.6 and the Annex IX), the communication and visibility material, including at the level of project partners, must be **made available upon request to the Union's institutions**, bodies, offices, or agencies. A **royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license** to use such material and any pre-existing rights attached to it must be granted to the Union. This should not require significant additional costs or a significant administrative burden either for the project partners or the programme. Any visuals the project uses need to be acquired with this requirement in mind.

The programme does not provide a newsletter tool, an extranet or other password-protected section. Subject to the prior approval of the joint secretariat, projects may develop other digital communication tools (e.g., newsletter) and add them to the programme's predefined website map. Ideally, any such tools should be planned and justified in the application form. If this is not the case, projects are requested to consult the joint secretariat before any development work in order to confirm whether the additional costs are eligible and can be reported in the progress report. All communication tools must be designed in accordance with the branding guidelines for projects.

The integration of programme and project websites is intended to ensure a more efficient interconnection between the project activities and the programme. Interreg Europe will ensure that the information published by the projects is searchable in a database that stores data from every Interreg Europe project. This will enable project news and events and other content to be more readily integrated into the programme website, resulting in higher project visibility. This integrated system of websites is intended to eliminate the need for projects to procure and set up a website themselves, with all the resourcing costs this would entail.

Partners' own institutional websites and social media sites

In accordance with paragraph 4 (a) of Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 all project partners must publish information about their project on their official institutional website, where such a website exists, or otherwise on their social media sites. The information must include a short description of the project, its aims, and results and must highlight the financial support from the European Union. The information about the project must also include the main project visual, set in a visible position, in compliance with the programme's general visibility and publicity requirements. A link to the project website should be provided to allow visitors to obtain more information about the project's activities.

Poster

Within six months after the approval of their project, each project partner must place at least one poster with information about the project (minimum size A3), including the financial support from the Union, at a location readily visible to the public, such as the entrance area of a building (Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Section II, Article 36(4), paragraph d). Controllers will check compliance with this article. The Interreg Europe programme provides a downloadable template for producing the poster. The poster template can be modified by the project partners at their own responsibility. The text of the poster can be translated into national languages. The poster needs to stay visible for the whole duration of the project. Any external printing costs or any necessary modifications to the poster should be budgeted in the project application under the external expertise and services budget line. It is not possible to substitute the poster with a roll-up banner. However, an equivalent electronic display of the poster is permissible.

Plaques/ Billboards

Any project involving physical investment (i.e., in the event of infrastructure/works and/or equipment in the context of a pilot action) must display a durable plaque or billboard which is clearly visible to the public and presents the Union's emblem in accordance with the technical characteristics laid down in Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Article 36 (4) paragraph c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/ 1059. These must be in place at the start of the physical implementation of a pilot involving investment, the purchase of equipment, or the installation of equipment.

The Interreg Europe programme will provide a downloadable template for producing the plaque or billboard. The template can be modified by the project partners at their own responsibility. The text of the plaque or billboard may be translated into national languages.

7.2 Implementing a communication strategy

The project's communication strategy should be implemented as soon as the programme's monitoring committee has approved the project. The programme's minimum requirements for communication activities and reporting procedures for project activities are described below.

7.2.1 Communication channels and activities

There are many communication channels available for project activities. In line with the programme's own communication strategy, projects are expected to develop their activities using the following channels: website, social media, public relations and events, and publications.

Website

The project website is a standardised communication tool and is a requirement for all projects. It is provided by the programme to each project by their start date. All projects are expected to regularly update their website's content throughout the project's lifetime. The project website should serve as the main source of up-to-date information about the project.

Projects must:

- Edit their project summary and descriptions of policy instruments (homepage level) and pilot actions when relevant.

- Publish news and events linked to the project's activities and achievements

- Publish pictures, videos, documents (leaflet, brochure, etc.) about their project's activities and results.

On the practical side of the website updates, the programme offers support in the form of:

- Full guidelines on how to draft/edit content (use of the project administrator interface)

- Details about the Interreg Europe style guide & how to write for the web

- A special FAQ page and a designated contact person for project administrators.

Information is available online at www.interregeurope.eu.

Please note that the project website will contain an automatic disclaimer in the footer with the following text: *Responsibility for the content of this project micro-site lies with the lead partner of the project. The lead partner's contact info can be found in the section 'Contacts'. The Interreg Europe programme authorities are not liable for any information contained herein*.

Once the project website goes live, the programme will set up and send a report with user statistics for monitoring and evaluation purposes to each project on a monthly basis. It will be up to the project's communication manager to keep track of these reports, analyse them, and adjust the communication activities if needed.

Visibility and publicity requirements for the website and other online tools are described above in *section 7.1.2.*

Social media channels

The programme encourages projects to develop their presence online through social media and to use digital communication tools, when these are relevant to their communication strategy in general.

Interreg Europe is present on several social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram – the links are available on the programme website). If the project decides to use the same channel(s), the programme expects the project's communication manager to make links to the Interreg Europe digital presence (for example, use @interregeurope in their posts). The programme communication team will act in a reciprocal manner and tag the project social media posts to boost their visibility.

When using social media or digital tools, the partners should:

• Consider first and foremost their target groups. Assess the digital engagement of the relevant people and choose the appropriate channel or tool to reach them wisely.

• Provide dynamic, engaging, and interesting content. Use a storytelling approach with the target groups' expectations in mind. The content should bring some benefit to the followers.

• Try to build, grow, and manage the online community (target group). Just posting information is not enough. It is important to pay attention to the feedback received and to adapt the project messages to the expectations and needs of the relevant social media users.

• Monitor the project's social media performance (number of views/users, other engagement statistics) to improve its communication methods over time.

• Avoid using digital communication tools only because it is trendy.

Public relations and events

The programme requires each project to organise one dissemination event near its end, during the follow-up phase. This should be the project's final event. Its objective is to present the results of the whole cooperation project to as wide an audience as possible. The project should strive to attract high-level policymakers relevant to the project's theme to this final event as this will also help to attract the press or other media as well as the general public. Representatives from the project's stakeholder group institutions should attend in order to show their continuous support for the use of the lessons learnt from the project in their region even after the project has ended. A representative of the programme's joint secretariat will usually participate in this final event. Lead partners should inform the policy and finance officers about the conference in due time and make sure a slot on the agenda is reserved for a presentation by the joint secretariat.

Projects should plan other public relations activities and events to engage with their target groups and convey the project's messages in order to reach their communication objectives. Activities such as conferences, exhibitions, round-table discussions, briefings with policymakers, or awareness-raising campaigns, online or in person, must always have a specific communication objective and relevant target group, in line with the project's communication strategy.

In general, when a project decides to organise a public relations activity or an event, its success will depend on a clear understanding of its purpose on the part of the target group it aims to reach. The key questions will always be:

• What is the purpose of this activity/event?

• How does it contribute to reaching the project's desired communication objective?

Once the event is over, the project partners will need to evaluate whether the activity contributed to their communication objective(s).

Projects may take part in external events, that is, activities organised by someone else. Participation as a speaker or as an exhibitor can help the project become more visible. External events can give projects an opportunity to meet with people from the target groups face-to-face and tell them about their work.

Projects should look for people who would endorse the project and work for it as ambassadors and speak about it to the public. Projects should prepare and circulate briefing documents, such as leaflets or brochures, to make sure that supporters also understand and relay the same core messages.

Interreg Europe also recommends that projects liaise with the national points of contact in their partner countries. The national points of contact can serve as relays to disseminate information about an event or achievement more widely and they may also appreciate receiving the news about a project and its activities.

During public relations activities and events, projects should ensure the visibility of the EU/programme funding on all communication materials targeting the public and the participants, using the project's main visual.

Poster and the publications

Projects are required to print at least one A3 poster for each project partner and to put it in a readily visible place on their premises. The programme will provide each project with the project poster template. The poster can be displayed electronically.

Projects can produce other electronic or printed communication material, such as booklets, leaflets, newsletters, studies, good practice guides, videos, or presentations, with a view to conveying the right messages to their target groups in the most appropriate and attractive format. However, projects should reduce the production of print publications to the absolute minimum, favouring digital means of communication whenever possible.

All publications, printed or electronic, must display the project's main visual.

Gifts and giveaways

As mentioned in chapter 6.4., gifts and giveaways are not eligible.

Media relations

The programme encourages all projects to inform the general public about their activities and achievements via the media (mainly the press – both online and printed). When preparing material for the media, projects should emphasise the name of the project, the programme, and in particular the EU funding. The published articles should ideally contain all three references (the EU funding, programme name, and the project acronym). When preparing the press kit for journalists, projects should emphasise the references in the material provided, mention them several times during press conferences and briefings, and in particular display them on all communication material.

The projects should look for creative and cost-efficient ways to get their messages into the media. However, the programme recommends that projects do not pay for articles. The media presence of a project should be the result of a successful communication strategy, not a paid campaign. Any deviation from this principle should be justified and approved by the joint secretariat.

7.2.2 Reporting on communication activities

Communication activities are an integral part of the project activities, hence reporting on them follows the same principles described in *section 5* (Project Implementation).

7.3 Programme support to projects and other synergies

7.3.1 Communication training and workshops

Newly approved projects will be invited to a series of workshops offered by the programme (see more on the services to projects in *section 3.2.3.3*). Participation in these workshops is strongly encouraged as it contributes to improving the overall quality of the programme.

One of the workshops focuses on communicating on the project activities and achievements. The communication workshops provide project lead partners and communication managers with practical tips and advice on how to make their communication a successful and effective tool for reaching the project's objectives. The workshops provide projects with more extensive guidance on a range of communication tools and techniques. The guidance comes from the programme and sometimes also from guest communication professionals. The workshops also offer an opportunity for lead partners to exchange experience and good practices in project communication, including on policy improvements, with other projects.

7.3.2 Online/ ad-hoc support

The programme offers a range of online training resources and advice in the form of documents and audio-visual materials on the programme website. Applicants and project managers are strongly encouraged to consult this guidance, which covers various aspects of implementing a project and complements the present programme manual.

The programme also organises webinars to provide advice and support to project partners.

7.3.3 What the programme expects of projects

Apart from regularly reporting on communication activities, the programme encourages projects to incorporate several other activities, including the following:

Programme events

Projects are expected to participate in the events organised by the programme. Depending on the duration of the project, up to 10 events over the lifetime of a project should be included in the work plan (covering both project phases).

Events may include:

• Annual Interreg Europe events

• Policy Learning Platform events

• Events organised by the European institutions (RegioStars/ EURegionsWeek)

• ECDay.

The programme may ask projects to present their results and achievements at any of the annual events, Policy Learning Platform events or other events (organised by partner states' national contact points for example).

In addition, there are several events organised by European institutions which may help the project achieve greater visibility, better disseminate their communication materials, and better publicise their results. The programme participates in these events with input from the projects. European Cooperation Day (ECDay on 21 September), for example, is a relatively new initiative presenting projects' work and local level results to the general public. Projects are encouraged to take part in this initiative, which can also bring them more visibility and increase contact with the local media.

Projects are advised to include costs for the participation in such events in their budget. See more on activities at programme level in *section 3.2.*

Other external events

Projects may also be invited to participate in other external events (especially European). In principle, this participation should contribute to the project's communication strategy and would imply an active participation through, for example, presenting their project or running a stand at the event.

Information exchange

All project partners need to create an **account in the Interreg Europe online community** (My Interreg Europe account). They should consider establishing a link between their project website(s) and the institutional websites of their national contact points. The programme encourages projects to include contact points in their stakeholder groups and to keep them in the loop with the most up-to-date information about the project's work and achievements.

Cooperation with the communication officer appointed in each country for the Structural Funds can also provide the project with a powerful channel for relaying the information that the partners wish to share with their local audiences. It could help the project persuade the press of the relevance and utility of their work and entice journalists to publish more news about the project's activities and achievements. In turn, the communication officer at the national level may require regular contact with the project partners from their country in order to collect region- and country-specific information about the programme through the project activities.

List of beneficiaries / project partners

The Regulation (EU) No 2021-1060 (Chapter III, Article 49.3) obliges the programme to publish a list of beneficiaries/project partners on its website. Once a project is approved, the following data will be published and updated regularly on the Interreg Europe website:

(a) in the case of legal entities, the beneficiaries

(b) project name

(c) the purpose of the operation/ project and its expected or actual achievements

(d) project start date

(e) expected or actual project completion date

(f) total cost of the project

(g) fund concerned

(h) specific objective concerned

(i) Union co-financing rate

(j) location indicator or geolocation for the project and country concerned

(k) for projects covering several locations, the location of the beneficiary where the beneficiary is a legal entity;

(l) type of intervention for the project in accordance with point (g) of Article 73(2).

Programme tools and templates

- **Project branding guidelines**
- **Main project visual**
- **A3 poster template**
- **Plaque/ billboard template**
- **PowerPoint template**
- **Social media templates**
- **Project website**

Checklist of publicity requirements

• **Logo set used**	*Required*
• **All partner institutions provide project information on their website, if such a website exists, and social media sites**	*Required*
• **All partner institutions' websites linked to Interreg Europe/ project website**	*Recommended*
• **All partner institutions place the A3 project poster at a clearly visible to the public visible place on their premises**	*Required*
• **Plaque or billboard clearly visible to the public at the start of the physical implementation of a pilot involving investment, the purchase of equipment, or the installation of equipment**	*Required*
• **EU support mentioned on all documents used for the public or the participants in the project's activities**	*Required*
• **Project website updated at least once every six months**	*Required*
• **A royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to use all project communication and visibility material and any pre-existing rights attached to it to be granted to the programme/ the European Union**	*Required*

List of key communication activities

- **Organise one final project dissemination event**
- **Participate in 6 to 10 events at programme level during the project lifetime**
- **Create an account in Interreg Europe's online community for all project partners involved**
- **Provide at least 1 high-quality photo related to the project topic**
- **Produce and publish at least two short videos about the project**
- **Publish and regularity update project presentation on achievements (ppt or similar)**

Notes

Policy learning **Platform**

C.

THE PLATFORM

8. The Policy Learning Platform

8.1 Context

The Policy Learning Platform was launched in 2015. This unique and innovative initiative builds on the success of the thematic capitalisation initiated under INTERREG IVC (2007-2013). The reason for setting up a Platform was to:

- Better exploit all the knowledge accumulated and results achieved by the Interreg Europe projects

- Offer policy learning services to any interested regions in Europe, without the need to be necessarily involved in a project.

Experience from the previous programmes shows that it is more difficult for small organisations to take part directly in interregional cooperation projects. Opening the programme to new beneficiaries is important in light of the ambitious objective set out in Article 3 of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 for interregional cooperation, i.e., "*to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy*". Interreg Europe has therefore put in place the Policy Learning Platform as a space for continuous or on demand **EU-wide policy learning open to any interested policymaker.**

The services offered by the Policy Learning Platform go beyond the capitalisation activities usually carried out by Interreg programmes by proposing a demand-driven service. This service includes peer review, for example, which starts with a region and its specific needs and brings in experienced peers and experts who help this region to address its challenges more effectively. This service was highly appreciated during the 2014-2020 programming period. Based on the positive feedback received and the increasing demand for the Platform activities, the Partner States decided to pursue and to further develop the Policy Learning Platform in order to better address the policy challenges facing regions across Europe.

8.2 Main features

What is the Policy Learning Platform?

The Policy Learning Platform is a strategic action of the Interreg Europe programme. It supports continuous policy learning and is open to any interested regions across Europe. Its services mainly exploit the knowledge generated by Interreg Europe's projects and make this accessible to all. The Policy Learning Platform covers all the regional development policy issues addressed by the programme (see also *section 2.5.2* 'Programme scope').

The Platform consists of:

• An international team of experts specialised in the policy fields addressed by the programme or in knowledge management and communication. This team is under contract with the programme to deliver the Platform's services to the regions across Europe interested in improving their regional development policies.

• An interactive web interface designed to facilitate networking, information sharing, knowledge management & exchange. Practitioners in regional development policy can find information and analysis in their own policy fields, as well as use a database of relevant practices and results from interregional cooperation projects. Registered users have access to a community of practitioners and other services on demand, e.g., expert helpdesk, matchmaking, and peer reviews.

The Policy Learning Platform operates at programme level and will run throughout the whole programme i.e., until 2029. The Platform runs its activities based on annual workplans, which define specific objectives, key activities, and expected results. Workplans are renewed by decision of the monitoring committee. In terms of implementation, the Platform is different from projects since it is sub-contracted by the managing authority to a consortium of experts through a public procurement procedure.

What are the Platform's objectives?

The aims of the Policy Learning Platform are:

(internal capitalisation)

a) To **exploit the results** of interregional cooperation projects and make them available to a wider audience of regional policy stakeholders across Europe.

(external capitalisation)

b) To **contribute to EU-wide capacity building and policy learning** by supporting networking and the exchange of experience among regions to improve their regional development policies, including their Investment for jobs & growth goal programmes. In order to achieve this objective, participation in the Platform activities is open to any interested relevant policymaker or regional development practitioner. The main added value is to ensure that any region can benefit from the programme's accumulated policy knowledge, even if it is not directly involved in a project.

Who can benefit from the Platform?

The Platform's services are available to any interested practitioners involved in regional development policies within the scope of cohesion policy.

In particular, the Platform's target groups are:

• stakeholders involved in managing and implementing regional development policies, including Structural Funds programmes

• other institutional stakeholders whose policy mandates are relevant for the issues addressed by the Platform e.g., the European Commission, the Committee of Regions, the European Environment Agency, the OECD, and other EU programmes.

The Platform: contributions from and benefits for Interreg Europe projects

Interreg Europe asks its project partners to be actively involved in the work of the Platform over the lifetime of their project by contributing content and by sharing their knowledge and experience. For instance, each region participating in a project is expected to provide the programme with good practices from their region and with a contact person for their specific policy field in order to create a community of regional practitioners throughout Europe.

Project partners can benefit from the expert advice, analysis, and recommendations to gain better insight into the policy fields in which they are involved. They can also use the Platform services and knowledge to create synergies with other projects and links with other EU initiatives or programmes. Overall, the Platform gives partners the opportunity to add value to their work, for example, by increasing their:

• understanding of the projects' achievements in their policy field

• understanding of the main EU policy trends in their policy field

• cooperation and networking with other organisations, communities, and regions

• ability to disseminate their project results beyond their project partnership

• appreciation of alternative solutions used in other European regions to address the policy challenges they face.

What kinds of services does the Platform provide?

The Platform provides services for the whole community of regional policy stakeholders involved in regional development policies.

The services provided can be grouped under the following 3 categories:

- **A knowledge hub** - a policy watch service offering up-to-date info on the latest developments in a range of policy areas (e.g., policy briefs, webinars, reports, other platforms) including the good practice database

- **A community of peers** - networking opportunities for regional policy stakeholders

- **Expert support** - to help policymakers develop policy through organised access to people with the right experience (e.g., policy helpdesk, matchmaking, peer reviews).

Under these categories, the Platform can include activities such as (non-exhaustive):

The knowledge hub:

- analyses, benchmarks, and disseminates the content and results of interregional cooperation projects (including validation of good practices).

- prepares and publishes thematic material and guidance, such as newsletters, studies, policy briefs and recommendations, showcasing good practice examples related to current regional challenges.

- monitors, as far as possible, EU policy trends on subjects related to the programme's policy objectives, the goal being to identify the practices and developments of interest, or where synergies and links may be useful.

- contributes to promoting Interreg Europe by disseminating the Platform's activities and results.

The community of peers:

- organises and facilitates (proactively and on demand) thematic networking, capacity building and policy learning events, workshops and meetings for the Platform's registered stakeholder community.

- organises specific activities on the request of the Partner States e.g., targeted thematic workshops.

Expert support:

- manages the policy helpdesk to answer requests for information and data and policy advice from individual stakeholders.

- advises running projects on thematic issues, where relevant.

- organises and facilitates matchmaking sessions and peer reviews on request between European regions in support of policy improvement and capacity building.

What the Platform can offer projects

The Platform's advice to running projects is different in nature from the project development, assessment, and monitoring guidance assured by the joint secretariat and given to guarantee objective and technical support to projects. More precisely:

The Platform can support projects in their policy development work by:

- inviting them to join the Platform's activities in order to share their insights and contribute to thematic and networking events; organising matchmaking, peer reviews, and other relevant workshops.

- advising them on relevant findings from policy analyses, offering policy recommendations, and advising on thematic initiatives of interest.

- ensuring synergies between the projects by circulating relevant information e.g., interesting practices from the projects which could benefit the work of others or which might catalyse a cross-fertilisation effect.

As a spillover effect, the knowledge exchange and networking resulting from the platform's activities may lead to new project ideas and partnerships which could be pursued under other programmes or as an Interreg Europe project. Project development is however not within the remit of the platform.

The platform cannot:

- assist applicants

- assess applications

- monitor project implementation

- organise exchange of experience activities on behalf of projects.

The role of Platform experts is to focus exclusively on content-related questions. Project development (i.e., assisting applicants), assessing applications, and monitoring projects remains the core competence of the managing authority / joint secretariat.

How can the Platform's services be accessed?

Online access to the Platform is via the Interreg Europe website: *www.interregeurope.eu.*

Interested stakeholders can easily access a wealth of policy solutions, such as good practices, policy briefs, success stories, event content, and reports. They can also subscribe to thematic newsletters and contact the experts by phone or email.

However, in order to access more complete expert policy advice and support services, users need to create an account in the Interreg Europe community. Registered users can:

- access advanced community features, such as seeing the full profile of practitioners and their contact details, personalising, commenting on, and following content, managing their notifications, etc.

- register for policy learning events and receive follow-up and tailored content

- submit a question to the policy helpdesk and receive written advice from an expert using a simple online form.

- submit a request for matchmaking or peer review (only for public authorities) using a simple online application.

N.B. The Platform is not a funding mechanism, it does not award any kind of grant to regions. **Registration and participation in all the Platform services, information, events, etc. is free of charge.**

How to evaluate the performance of the Platform

As explained in *section 2.4* (The programme's intervention logic), the intensity of cooperation is lighter in the Platform than in projects. This means that expectations in terms of achievements are also different for the Platform, which focuses primarily on increasing the capacity of participants through its activities. For the most demanding activities, such as the peer reviews, the Platform may even contribute to policy improvements, even if this contribution will always be indirect.

The main indicators used to monitor the Platform's performance are summarised in table 6 below.

Table 6: Interreg Europe Platform's main indicators

Policy objective	Specific objective	Output indicators	Result indicators
Interreg Specific Objective: a better cooperation governance	Strengthening institutional capacities for more effective regional development policies	**RCO81**: **Participations in joint actions across borders**	**RI1: People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events**
		RCO87: Organisations cooperating across borders[1]	**RI2: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation**
		OI4: Policy instruments addressed	**RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe**

These indicators are monitored on an ongoing basis using surveys when relevant.

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1. As explained in the intervention logic section (*section 2.4*), several indicators (i.e., RCO 87, organisations with increased capacity, policy instruments addressed and improved) are only relevant to a few (but important) of the PLP's activities, such as the peer reviews.

Our #policylearning services

Peer review

Receive tailored recommendations from selected peers and experts on your regional challenges during a **two-day meeting.**

Matchmaking session

Exchange on good practices across Europe during a **two-hour discussion** with selected peers and experts.

Policy helpdesk

Get **personalised answers** from our experts to your questions about regional policymaking.
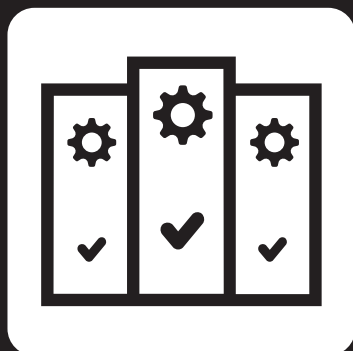
Thematic knowledge

Access the latest EU policy trends and our projects' insights. Check out policy briefs, news and good practices.

Community of peers

Join policy learning events and share experiences with like-minded people.

Good practice database

Explore thousands of expert validated solutions identified by our cooperation projects and beyond. Pick up ideas relevant to you and get in touch with people who tested it on the ground for further inspiration.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Action plan for policy improvement - template

This template is automatically integrated in the last progress report of the core phase. It appears in the 'Results' for regions which haven't yet demonstrated any policy improvement.

Policy context

1/ Policy instrument addressed

Does the action plan address the initial policy instrument addressed in the application form?

□ *Yes*   □ *No*

If no, please provide the features of the new policy instrument(s) addressed:

(see description of a policy instrument in the application form)

2/ What kind of improvements do you envisage for this instrument?

- New projects financed through the instrument   □
- Change in the management of the instrument   □
- Revision of the instrument itself   □

Please further explain the expected improvement deriving from the action(s)?

Details of the action(s) envisaged

ACTION X:

Name of the action: _____

1. **Relevance to the project** *(please describe how this action derives from the project and in particular from the interregional exchange of experience. Where does the inspiration for this action come from?)*

   _____

   _____

2. **Nature of the action** *(please describe the content of action 1 precisely. What are the specific activities to be implemented?)*

   _____

   _____

3. **Stakeholders involved** *(please indicate the organisations in the region which are involved in the implementation of the action and explain their role)*

   _____

   _____

4. **Timeframe** *(please specify the timing envisaged for the action)*

   _____

   _____

5. **Indicative costs and source of funding** *(if applicable, please estimate the costs related to the implementation of action 1)*

   _____

   _____

Appendix 2 – 2021-2027 performance framework

Interreg Europe indicators

Table 2 presents the proposed Interreg Europe indicators for the 2021-2027 period.

Table 2: Interreg Europe 2021-2027 proposed indicators

Policy objective	Specific objective	Output indicators	Result indicators
Interreg Specific Objective: a better cooperation governance	Strengthening institutional capacities for more effective regional development policies	**RCO81**: **Participations in joint actions across borders** (Platform) **RCO87: Organisations cooperating across borders** (projects and when relevant Platform)[1] **RCO84: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects** **OI4: Policy instruments addressed** (projects and when relevant Platform)	**RI1: People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events** **RI2: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation** (projects and when relevant Platform) **RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe** *RI3.a/ Investment for Jobs and Growth programmes improved thanks to Interreg Europe*

Result indicators 3.a is sub-element of result indicator 3 specifically focusing on IJ&G programmes. It is indicated in italics since it will not be explicitly listed as indicators in the Cooperation Programme but will be included in the programme manual and will be monitored in the course of the programme implementation.

Following the recommendation of the Commission, the indicator 'amounts of funds influenced' is not included in the performance framework. As reflected in Chart 2, the financial influence can be considered as an 'indirect' result of the cooperation. As such, it represents more an impact than a result of the cooperation. Nevertheless, based on the positive experience gained in the present and previous programmes, this indicator could still be monitored for projects at the implementation stage. Projects which will be able to demonstrate a policy improvement achieved thanks to Interreg Europe will also have the possibility to report on its financial impact if possible. This impact indicator will be followed globally but also specifically for IG&G programmes.

---

1. *As explained under the intervention logic, several indicators (i.e. RCO 87, organisations with increased capacity, policy instruments addressed and improved) are only relevant to a few (but important) activities of the Platform such as the peer reviews.*

Table 3: Overview of the Interreg Europe 2021-2027 performance framework

| Actions | Budget (ERDF) | Indicators | | | M.U | Baseline | | Milestone 2024 | Target 2029 | Intervention field - code |
		Code	Type	Name		Value	Year			
Projects	MEUR 347.6	RCO 87	O	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	2021	0	12 920	170[1]
		RCO 84	O	Pilot actions developed jointly	Pilot activities	0	2021	0	190	
		OI4	O	Policy instruments addressed	Policy instruments	0	2021	0	1 620	
		RI2	R	Organisations with increased capacity	Organisations	0	2021	n.a.	8 450	
		RI3	R	Policy instruments improved	Policy instruments	0	2021	n.a.	810	
Policy Learning Platform[2]	MEUR 17.6	RCO 81	O	Participants in interregional events	Participants	0	2021	0	14 000	170
		RCO 87	O	Organisations cooperation across borders	Organisation	0	2021	0	80	
		OI4	O	Policy instruments addressed	Policy instruments	0	2021	0	80	
		RI1	R	People with increased capacity	Participants	0	2021	n.a	4 200	
		RI2	R	Organisations with increased capacity	Policy instruments	0	2021	n.a.	50	
		RI3	R	Policy instruments improved	Policy instruments	0	2021	n.a.	40	

1. 170 - Improving the capacity of programme authorities and bodies linked to the implementation of Funds

2. The programme enlargement to 7 new countries means that more regions will be able to access the Platform services. Nevertheless, as far as the platform's performance is concerned, it is proposed to keep the target values as they were initially estimated for several reasons. First, the estimation of target values for the Platform is challenging, and the different estimations provided in this framework are already ambitious. Second, the enlargement to 7 new countries has limited impact on the PLP budget with less than a 4% increase.
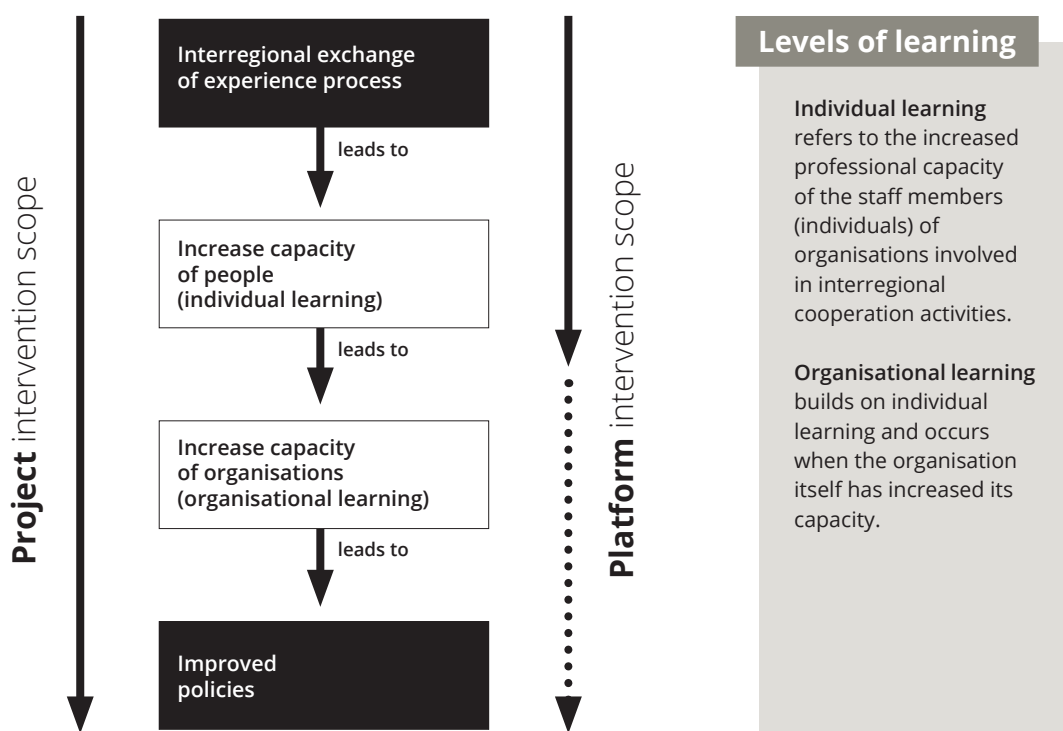
Rationale

Programme's intervention logic

The programme's overall objective is to improve the implementation of regional development policies thanks to the increased institutional capacities of regional policy actors achieved through exchange of experience and implementation of innovative approaches. To achieve this overall objective, the programme implements two types of actions: the projects and the Policy Learning Platform. Both actions primarily consist in supporting interregional activities (including joint pilot actions for projects) to foster exchange of experiences and good practices among people and organisations. Thanks to their involvement in these interregional cooperation activities (which can also include mobilisation of relevant stakeholders in the participating regions), the **people** but also their **organisations** gain new knowledge and increase their competences. Based on this increased capacity, these organisations finally then implement new measures based on the inspiration gained and **improve** the implementation of their regional development policies.

Due to their different characteristics and objectives, the two types of actions contribute to a different degree to the overall programme's objective. The learning process leading to policy improvement and the projects / Platform contribution to this process is summarised in Chart 2 below:

Chart 2: Steps toward the programme's objective

Levels of learning

Individual learning refers to the increased professional capacity of the staff members (individuals) of organisations involved in interregional cooperation activities.

Organisational learning builds on individual learning and occurs when the organisation itself has increased its capacity.

The intensity of cooperation is high within projects both in terms of timing (projects last several years) and nature of activities supported. This intensity is lower under the Platform where the support to learning remains occasional and mainly on a voluntary basis (Platform does not provide funding). As a capitalisation initiative, Platform can obviously not go as far as the projects in supporting the stakeholders' process and more generally the learning at organisational level[1].

As reflected in the arrows on Chart 1, this difference between the two types of actions also means that the expectations in terms of achievements are different between projects and Platform. While Platform activities primarily lead to increase capacity of individuals, projects activities go beyond this level (all people involved in projects should have increased their capacity at the end of the cooperation) and primarily aim at increasing the capacity of organisations leading to policy improvements. As a consequence, Platform contribution to policy improvements cannot be compared to that of projects. In projects, a policy improvement can be fully attributed to the programme's intervention. This is not the case with the Platform services where the contribution to policy improvements is expected to remain indirect. In cases where a policy improvement can be linked to a Platform activity (as a result of a peer review for instance), the necessary steps to reach the policy improvement (e.g. further discussion with stakeholders, preparation work with policy makers) will not be supported by the programme.

The set of proposed indicators tries to be as simple as possible while still properly reflecting the above programme's intervention logic (including the different contribution of projects and Platform) as summarised in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: intervention logic & indicators

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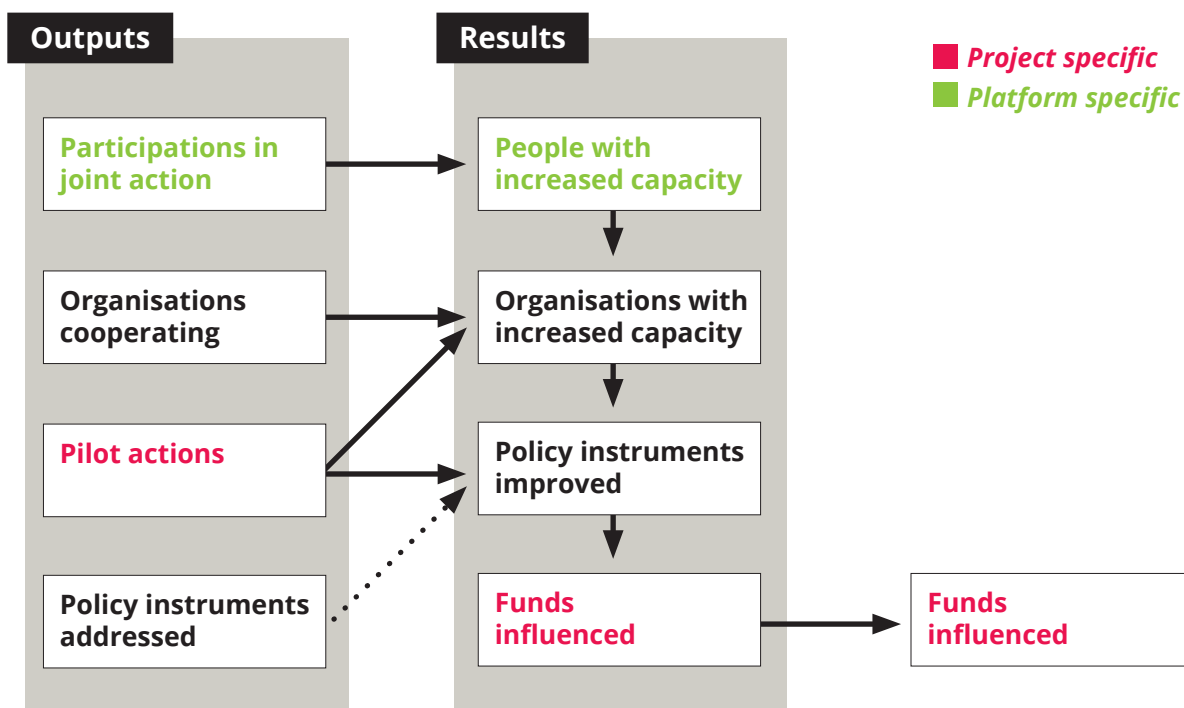
1. This logic is based on the experience gained in the 2014-2020 period. In the future, it does not prevent the Platform from developing other services and possibly from further contributing to the programme's objectives.

Table 3: Interreg Europe 2021-2027 – explanation for the choice of output and result indicators

Output indicators	Rationale
RCO81: Participations in joint actions across borders	In compliance with the Commission's definition, this indicator captures the number of participants in the interregional actions organised by the Platform (e.g., thematic workshops, thematic webinars, peer reviews). It is particularly relevant to Platform whose contribution to the capacity building process is primarily related to the increased capacity of people. It also provides a useful indication on the capitalisation scope and effort carried out by the Platform considering that participating in Platform activities is on a voluntary basis.
	This output indicator is directly related to the first result indicators on 'people with increased capacity'.
	Although projects contribute directly and very significantly to individual learning, this indicator (and its corresponding result indicators) do not apply to projects for the following main reasons:
	- As mentioned in table 1 with the current indicator on 'people with increased capacity', the output (participants) and result (people with increased capacity) indicators are equivalent in projects (98% of the participants confirmed they have increased their capacity). For the programme's performance, there is therefore no added value to monitor both indicators for projects where the value is expected to be the same (which is not the case with the Platform events). This also reflects that the focus on individual learning is not demanding enough for projects.
	- If the 'individual learning' indicators would apply to both projects and Platform, then it would no longer be possible to clearly identify the Platform performance (at least in the value reported to the Commission). Considering the means invested by the programme in projects compared to the platform, the value of the indicator would reflect to a very large extent the project activities only.
	- In terms of simplification, it would be easier for project to focus on their first basic objective which is to achieve organisational learning. A focus on individual learning would not only require a regular reporting of the number of participants, it would also imply another survey (in addition to the survey on organisational learning) at the end of the project.
RCO87: Organisations cooperating across borders	This indicator counts the organisations cooperating in the projects and when relevant in Platform. The Commission's definition of this indicator is rather restrictive considering that it refers to organisations that are "mentioned in the financing agreement of the application". In the context of Interreg Europe projects, the indicator does not only include the partner organisations but it also covers the stakeholders organisations actively involved in the cooperation. Since these stakeholder organisations are officially mentioned in the application form which itself is part of the 'financing agreement, this approach should be in line with the Commission's definition.
	This indicator is particularly relevant to projects whose aim is to go beyond the 'individual learning' by achieving increased capacity of the organisations involved through different activities (including the work of the stakeholders groups).
	For Platform, this indicator can be used only when it makes sense, meaning for the most demanding activities (e.g., peer review) where the host organisation may also be counted. However, since there is no 'financing agreement' for these activities, it should be checked with the commission if this approach remains in line with the definition of the indicator (host organisations will be still officially recorded through the application and follow-up measure of the peer- review).
	This output indicator is directly related to the second result indicators on organisation with increased capacity.

Output indicators	Rationale
RCO84: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	This indicator captures the number of new approaches tested within projects. This indicator which is also included in list of common Interreg indicators allows to reflect the more predominant place given to pilot actions in the 2021-2027 period although not all projects will support such actions. It also puts the emphasis on the outputs going beyond the traditional exchange of experience actions and requiring a more intensive cooperation in projects. As reflected in chart 1, this output indicator is linked to two result indicators. First, pilot actions contribute to increase the capacity of organisations involved in its implementation (learning by doing). It is also directly related to the third result indicator on policy instruments improved. Indeed, in the Interreg Europe context, pilot actions are possible only if they clearly contribute to the improvement of a policy instrument in case of success. This means that the continuation or generalisation of the pilot action after its support by Interreg Europe is in principle considered as an improvement of a policy instrument.
OI4: Policy instruments addressed by projects and Platform	This indicator captures the number of policy instruments addressed by projects and when relevant by Platform. While for projects, this is systematically recorded in the monitoring system from application stage until closure, it only applies to the most elaborated services of the Platform and in particular the peer reviews (which also requires the mobilisation of the relevant stakeholders in the host region). It would neither make sense nor be feasible to collect this information for the other services of the platform. Even if the policy instrument addressed may be not considered as an output in the strict definition of the terms, it still reflects the scope of the need tackled by the programme and is also directly related to result indicator 3 on the policy instruments improved. This indicator will be completed at project application. It will then be updated if needed (in case any additional policy instrument is addressed / improved) on a six-month basis through the projects' progress reports.

Result indicators	Rationale
RI1: People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events	This indicator captures the individual learning achieved thanks to the Platform activities.

As reflected in Charts 1 and 2, the increased capacity of individuals is a necessary step towards the organisational learning. It is the core result expected from the capitalisation activities organised within the Platform.

It is directly linked to the output indicator RCO 81.

Following the experience of the current programme with this indicator and as reflected in Appendix 2.1, its monitoring will be based on a survey sent to the participants in the Platform events (seminars, workshops, match making sessions, peer reviews).

In the list of Common Interreg Indicators, RCO81 (Participations in joint actions across borders) is intended be used together with RCR85 (Participating in joint actions across borders after project completion). However, RCR85 is not adapted to the Interreg Europe rationale where the continuation of the cooperation beyond the duration of the project is not an objective per se. On the contrary, a successful project usually means that the regions involved have successfully 'mainstreamed' the lessons learnt from the cooperation into their own regional development policies before the end of the project. When regions have found the solutions and inspiration they were looking for, they usually do not need to maintain the cooperation beyond the project. This approach to durability is another core difference between interregional cooperation and cross-border / transnational cooperation.

This indicator will be completed regularly after each main Platform events. |
| RI2: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation | This indicator captures the organisational learning which is one of the core results expected from projects. Beyond the increased capacity of individuals, the programme aims at improving the capacity of organisations (partners and stakeholders) so they are able to improve the way they function and implement their actions. As reflected in Charts 1 and 2, the increased capacity of organisations is a necessary step towards the improvement of regional development policies (i.e., any policy improvement implies first that an organisation has increased its capacity).

This result indicator is directly linked to RCO 87.

Although it is primarily relevant to projects, it will also apply to the most demanding activities of the Platform (e.g., peer reviews) where the intensity of cooperation is sufficient to generate organisational learning (from the host organisation).

This indicator was jointly elaborated with transnational cooperation programmes and the methodology to ensure its monitoring is also available (see Appendix 2.2). It is based on the current approach developed by the Baltic Sea programme.

In the list of Common Interreg Indicators, RCO87 (Organisations cooperating across borders) is intended be used together with RCR84 (Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion). However, for the same reason provided for RI1, RCR84 is not adapted to the Interreg Europe rationale where the continuation of the cooperation beyond the duration of the project is not an objective per se. A successful project usually means that the regions involved have successfully 'mainstreamed' the lessons learnt from the cooperation into their own regional development policies before the end of the project. When regions have found the solutions and inspiration they were looking for, they usually do not need to maintain the cooperation beyond the project. This approach to durability is another core difference between interregional cooperation and cross-border / transnational cooperation.

This indicator will be completed at project completion. |

Result indicators	Rationale
RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe	This indicator counts the core result expected from the Interreg Europe projects and from the most elaborated services of the Platform: the improvement of regional development policies. It is linked to the output indicator 'Policy instrument addressed'. It allows monitoring to which extent the learning resulting from the cooperation is transformed into action and lead to concrete measures in the regions. In projects, the successful implementation of a pilot action can also result in the improvement of a policy instrument. This is where there may be a link between this indicator and the common indicator RCR 104 'Solutions taken-up by organisations'. The indicator can be completed only when the policy improvement can be fully or at least partly attributed to the programme's intervention. Under the projects, this causality link can be direct while in the Platform, other external factors play a role. This indicator will be completed on a six-months basis through the projects' progress reports.

Baseline and target values

The baseline value for all output and result indicators as defined above is '0' at the start of the programme in 2021 considering that first projects and Platform activities will start in the course of 2022 only.

The method of calculation and assumptions are detailed in Appendix 2.3 of the present document. The estimation of these target values takes into consideration statistics of the present programme as well as a number of assumptions depending on the indicators concerned. When drafting the present methodological document, it was ensured that the data underpinning the indicator baselines, milestones, and targets were taken from a reliable source (e.g., the monitoring system or official statistics). Whenever this was not the case, the necessary steps were taken to ensure the quality of the data.

Table 4: Interreg Europe output indicators – target values

Indicators	Measurement unit	Baseline (2021)	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
RCO 81: Participations in joint actions across borders (Platform)	Participants	0	0	14,000
RCO 87: Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	0	13,000
RCO 84: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	0	190
OI4: Policy instruments addressed	Policy instruments	0	0	1,700

Table 5: Interreg Europe result indicators – target values

Indicators	Measurement unit	Baseline (2021)	Final target (2029)
RI1: People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events	Participants	0	4,200
RI2: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation	Organisations	0	8,500
RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe	Policy instruments	0	850

The added-value of the present framework is to allow monitoring the results not only in absolute terms (i.e. total number of participants or organisations with increased capacity, total number of policy instruments improved) but also and more importantly in relative terms (% of participants in Platform activities with increased capacity; % of organisations involved with increased capacity; % of policy instrument addressed finally improved). This is through this relative approach that the overall programme's performance will be expressed in its most meaningful way (out of all programme beneficiaries, how many are better off at the end?)[1].

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1. *See also the Result Based Accountability approach which considers that results have to be expressed in relative terms to be meaningful and to properly reflect the performance of a public intervention*

To a certain extent, this also applies to the impact indicators (funds influenced) monitored during implementation stage of projects and whose value can be compared to the total ERDF/IPA/NDICI budget of the programme (i.e. this has been used in previous programming periods to demonstrate the leverage effect of the programme).

Data quality assurance

A precise definition of the indicators is the first prerequisite to ensure clarity and reliability of the performance framework. As it was already the case in the previous programming periods, a detailed definition of each indicator will be provided in the programme manual.

For both output and results indicators, the data will be provided by the programme monitoring system. The system will be developed based on the experience gained since many years now and will ensure the reliability of the information collected. Projects and platform will have to report on indicators on a regular basis (through progress reports) and more importantly to provide evidence on the values provided. This input will be integrated in the monitoring system that can generate automatic statistics and consolidated data.

As far as the output indicators are concerned, the reliability is ensured in essence since the four proposed indicators build on factual elements to be reported and justified by the projects and platform:

- The number of participants in joint actions across borders refers to individual people involved in the Platform events. On a regular basis and based on the attendance list, the platform will report in its monitoring system the list of individual people that participate in its activities. This list will be checked by the JS before validating the value provided for the indicator.

- The number of organisations refers to the legal entities that are involved in interregional cooperation. For projects, this covers not only the organisations listed as official partners in the application form, but it also includes stakeholder organisations actively involved in the cooperation. Obviously, the partner organisations will automatically be recorded in the monitoring system while a list of stakeholder organisations involved per region will have to be provided in the relevant section of the progress report. For the Platform, this information can be monitored and recorded in the monitoring system for the relevant expert support service (peer reviews).

- The number of pilot actions will also be reported by projects through a dedicated indicator in the progress report. However, considering the definition of this common indicator, projects will only be able to report it once the pilot actions are completed meaning towards the end of the project's implementation.

- The number of policy instruments addressed is also extracted from the application form for the project and from the template used for the expert support services for the Platform. Like the other output indicators, the data is automatically generated through the monitoring system.

The programme will also put in place a system to ensure the reliability on the values reported for the result indicators although some of them are based on self-declaration from the beneficiaries:

- The number of people with increased capacity will be included in the monitoring system and will derive from the satisfaction questionnaire that will follow each Platform event. This questionnaire will include a dedicated question on increased capacity (see also Appendix 2.1). All participants in Platform events will be strongly encouraged to complete the questionnaire.

- Similarly, the number of organisations with increased capacity will be integrated in the monitoring system and will be the results of a dedicated survey jointly developed with transnational programmes and available as Appendix 2.2. For projects, this survey will be launched in the last months of the project's duration. All organisations involved in the project as reported in the progress reports (partners and stakeholders) should complete the survey. For Platform, this survey will be integrated in the follow-up measures of the related event which usually are organised a few months after the event. The host organisation of the event will have to answer this survey.

- The number of policy instruments improved will be automatically calculated through the statistics of the monitoring system. For the Platform, this indicator will be monitored only for the most elaborated service (i.e. the expert support service). This is indeed the only service for which a direct causality link can be established between the action supported and the results achieved.

Result indicators 3 (i.e., policies improved) will however be based on a self-declaration system in the progress reports and in the Platform monitoring system (as it is already the case in the current programme). The programme will therefore have to carry out a systematic validation process each time this indicator is completed. This process will be based on a methodology that was tested and developed since several programming periods now. To ensure that the result can be attributed to Interreg Europe, the JS will follow a strict checklist detailing the criteria to be met. The example of the 2014-2020 checklist used by Project Officers to assess the result reported in the progress report by projects is provided as Appendix 2.4. These criteria and questions will also be adapted to the types of actions monitored (projects or Platform) (e.g., are the final results of the pilot action clearly defined? Is the policy improvement clearly defined? Are details on the 'learning' process to achieve this improvement provided? Is the improvement clearly linked to the project or Platform activities?). If one of these criteria is not fulfilled, the value of the indicator will not be validated and would need to be removed from the monitoring system[1].

Beyond the issue of indicators, the quality control is fully integrated into all procedures in place within the Joint secretariat in particular through the application of check lists that all Joint secretariat members have to comply with in their daily work.

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1. In the current programme, it is estimated that around 50% of the results initially reported by projects in their progress report are not validated by the programme.

Appendix 2.1 – People with increased capacity

Guidance on monitoring "people with increased capacity"

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform (Platform) helps practitioners of regional development policies to increase their professional skills through offering a range of different services. Increased professional capacity means that participants have gained new knowledge in their field of expertise, knowledge that helps them to better perform their job. The Platform should regularly report on the result indicator 'People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events'.

To ensure reliability and consistency in the way to monitor this indicator, the questionnaire should be addressed to all participants of Platform events.

The value provided for the indicator will correspond to the total number of people who answered 'to a small degree' or 'to a large degree' to question of the questionnaire. As a supporting document to the value provided, Platform will need to regularly provide a list of names of these participants.

Information to be included in the satisfaction questionnaire after each Platform event:

Your details*

Name and surname: _____

Organisation: _____

Country: _____

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements*:

	Not at all	**To a small degree**	**To a large degree**
As a result of this event, I have gained new knowledge and ideas that are useful for my work			

Please explain more precisely which elements you gained from the event and contributed to increase your professional capacity (max. 1,500 characters):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2.2 – Organisations with increased capacity

Guidance on monitoring "organisations with increased capacity"

Survey context and guidance

A survey is to be used to collect data for the programme-specific result indicator '*Organisations with increased professional capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation'.*

The sample survey template below was developed to ensure consistency across projects and platform in monitoring this indicator. It was designed to be as simple as possible to serve the purpose stated in the paragraph above.

The programme shall provide this survey to project lead partners and platform beneficiaries (i.e., beneficiaries of Policy Learning Platform peer reviews). For projects, the indicator needs to be completed in the last progress report and the survey should therefore be launched in the final semester of the project implementation. For Policy Learning Platform, the survey should be included in the 'follow-up' measures of the event.

For projects, lead partners are responsible for disseminating the survey to their project partners, which shall then collect survey responses from organisations both within and outside of the project partnership that participated in project activities (i.e., including stakeholders). The lead partner is responsible for collating the responses in an overview table that it provides to the programme.

The number of respondents answering *Yes* to question 2 is the value of the indicator. Projects shall report this value to the programme along with their final report, i.e. by project completion.

During the application phase, the programme shall provide lead applicants with information about data collection for this indicator to help them in setting a realistic target.

The project may decide on the format of the survey and how to send it out. The project may decide to translate the survey into local languages.

Survey template – sample only

[Preamble]

1. **Identification**

   a. Your name and surname: ....

   b. E-mail address: ....

   c. Organisation name: ....

   d. Country: ....

   e. Status in project:
      ☐ partner
      ☐ stakeholder

2. **Did the capacity of your organisation increase as a result of involvement in this project?**

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No / Not sure

3. **If this is the case, how was this reflected within your organisation?** *Select all that apply*

   ☐ It uses new knowledge or skills

   Please describe: ....

   ☐ It adopted new internal tools, new procedure or workflows

   Please describe: ....

   ☐ It changed its organisational structure

   Please describe: ....

   ☐ It has improved a regional development policy instrument it is in charge of[1]

   Please describe: ....

   _____

   1. *For projects, this improvement should be reported in the relevant progress report. For PLP, this improvement should be recorded in the relevant monitoring tool.*

Appendix 2.3 – Indicators - assumptions and calculation

Table 1: 2021-2027 Interreg Europe indicators
(based on statistics and assumptions presented in tables below)

Performance framework				
Output indicators	**Milestones (2024)**	**Calculations and / or assumptions**	**Final target (2029)**	**Calculation and / or assumptions**
RC081: Participation in joint actions across borders (Platform)	**0**	Considering that Platform will start at the earliest in 2022, the value takes into consideration 2,5 years of implementation. 2029 target value (14 000) x 2,5 years / 7 years = 5 000 However, according the EC methodology for RCO81, RCO84 and RCO 87, only the outputs of 'finalised' operations can be taken into consideration. Since netiher the Policy Learning Platform nor any projects will be finalised by 2024, the milestones for this indicators is set at '0'.	**14,000**	The estimation of this indicator is particularly challenging. It took time for the 2014-2020 platform to reach its full speed and, when it reached this level, the COVID-19 crisis occurred. There are therefore few trustworthy references to define the target values for the future programme. The current estimation is based on the 3rd contract of the platform which was the most productive. Under this contract, an average of 1,435 participants per year were involved in the Platform actions for a total average budget per year of MEUR 1,4. In the next programming period, the average annual budget per year could reach up to MEUR 2,4. The link between budget and participants is however not fully direct. First, the events are only one among the 4 Platform services. Second, the ambition in the future is to develop more demand driven services (e.g. match making sessions and peer reviews). Although these services are among the most appreciated by the regions, there are also more costly and involve less participants. Considering these different elements, it is anticipated that the average number of participants per year in the Platform actions could increase to 2 000 people. 14 000 = 2 000 x 7 years
RCO87: Organisations cooperating across borders	**0**	Projects: estimated number of projects approved by 2024 (110) x estimated average number of organisations involved per project (63) = 6 930 By 2024, it is estimated that half of the expecteds projects could be approved. Platform: estimated number of host organisations involved in peer review per year (12) x 2,5 years = 30 Total = 6 960 (rounded to 6 900) As highlighted above, the 2024 milestone is nevertheless indicated at '0' to comply with the EC methodology.	**13,000**	Projects: estimated average number of organisations involved per project (63) x estimated number of projects (240) = 15 120 PLP: 84 = estimated number of host organisations involved in peer review per year (12) x 7 years Total = 15,204 It is however the first time this indicator will be monitored and the programme prefers to remains prudent in its estimation which is therefore reduced and rounded to 13,000.

RC0 84: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	**0**	According to the EC definition of this indicator, it seems that the pilot action can be counted only once completed. First call projects are expected to start in January 2023 and will be able to propose pilot actions from the start of the cooperation. This possibility is however new compared to the 2014-2020 programme where no experience exists. Even if some of these projects include pilot actions from the start, only few of these pilots may be completed by end of 2024 (the programme will recommend a 3 year duration for the core phase). It is therefore more realistic to consider the 2024 milestones at '0'.	**190**	The development of innovative approaches will be further encouraged in the 2021-2027 programme. In particular, pilot actions will be possible from the start of the project. On this basis and considering the current average number of pilot actions for first and second call projects (0,62), the assumption is an increase of this average to 0,8 in the future programme. Estimated number of projects (240) x estimated average nuber of pilot actions per project (0,8) = 192 (rounded to 190)
OI4: Poliyc instruments addressed	**800**	Projects: By 2024, it is estimated that half of the expected projects could be approved. Estimated number of projects approved by 2024 (110) x average number of policy instrument addressed by project (7) = 770 Platform: estimated number of policy instruments per year (12) x 2,5 years = 30 Total = 800	**1,700**	Projects: estimated number of policy instruments per project (7) x estimated number of projects (240) = 1,680 PLP: estimated number of policy instrument addressed per year (12) x years of implementation (7) = 84 Total: 1,764 (rounded to 1,700)

Result indicators	Final target 2029)	Calculations and / or assumptions
RI1: People with increased capacity due to their participation in Platform events	**4,200**	The Platform experience is limited in this domain since the Platform statrted monitoring this indicator only in the course of the 3rd contract implementation. Under MS3, 373 people had increased capacity out of more than 2,000 participants which represent less than 19%. While a high percentage of people with increased capacity is expected from the host regions participating in a peer reviews, this percentage is more difficult to assess for participants in less intensive events (e.g. workshops, seminars). One of the main chalenges is that this indicator depends on the final rate of answers to the questionnaire sent after each event. In the current programme, this rate was often below 50%. On this basis, the objective of having at least 30% of participants on Platform events with increased capacity appears reasonable. Estimated total number of participants (14 000) x 30% = 4 200
RI2: Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation	**8,500**	This indicator is also new for Interreg Europe. Considering the intensity of cooperation in projects, it is expected that a majority of organisations involved in projects (or hosting a PLP peer review) will be able to demonstrate increased capacity at the end of the cooperation. On this basis, the objective of having at least 2 out of 3 organisations involved with increased capacity appears reasonable. Estimated total number of organisations involed (13,000) x 66% = 8,580 (rounded to 8,500)
RI3: Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe	**850**	Based on the current statistics for first call projects, the fact that half of the policy instruments addressed will be improved by the end of the programme seems to be a reasonable assumption and remains still an ambitious objective to be achieved. Target value of 2029 (1,700) x 50% = 850

Interreg Europe 2014-2020 statistics (as of 19/01/2021)		
Outputs	**Data**	**Source & explantion if relevant**
Budget to projecs	322,400,000	
Budget to Platform	15,300,000	Currently, the Platform budget represents 4,53% of the total operations budget (MEUR 337,7)
Number of projects	258	Monitoring system / Taking into consideration partners with a minimum budget of EUR 15 000
Number of partners	2,066	iDB statistics (partners with more than EUR 15 000 total budget)
Average ERDF per project	1,249,612.40	Budget to projects / 258 projects
Average number of partners per project	8	No of partners / no of projects
Average number of stakholder organisations involved in each participating region of projects	8	Table of people with increased capacity submitted by projects at the end of Phase 1 (survey send to all participants at the end of Phase 1). This table also indicates the organisation of the people and whether this organisation is a partner or a staleholder in the project. This figure should however be taken with care. First, only respondants to the survey can be taken ino consideration. Second, the figure can vary a lot according to project.
Average number of pilot actions per project (first and second call)	0.62	Pilot actions overview table (81 out of 130 projects)
Total number of policy instruments addressed by projects	1,713	Monitoring system
Average number of policy instruments addressed by project (equal the number of regions involved)	7	Total number of instruments / 258 projects
Platform 3rd contract (MS3) budget (18 months from March 2019 to September 2020)	2,056,000.00	Platform MS3 final report
Number of participants in Platform actions in MS3	2,153	Platform monitoring system (MS3 chosen for reference since it is the first period where all Platform services were implemented as planned)
Average number of Platform pariticpants per year in MS3	1,435	(N° of participants in MS3/18) x 12 = 1 435
Average Platform budger per year in MS3	1,370,667	(Total MS budget/18) x 12 = 1 370 667 (rounded to 1 400 000)
Results	**Data**	**Source & explanation if relevant**
Percentage of policy instruments improved by first call projects	55%	Monitoring system - The statistics focus only on the most advanced projects (1st call) although not all of them are closed yet. By October 2020, 292 instruments were improved out of 524 addressed.

Orange field: statistics
Blue field: automatic calculation

Interreg Europe 2021-2027 data and estimations (with 37 Partner States)		
Features	**Data**	**Justification if needed**
Programme budget dedicated to operations (ERDF, IPA, NDICI)	365,261,000	
Estimated total project budget (ERDF, IPA, NDICI)	347,589,000	
Estimated total PLP budget (ERDF, IPA, NDICI)	17,672,000	To reflect the potential of the Platform which was only intiated for the first time in the 2014-2020 period, it is proposed to slightly increase its budget to 5% of the total operation budget. At any moment, it is anyway possible to allocate back these funds to projects in case it is needed while the allocation of funds from projects to Platform is much more difficult due to its implementation modalities (e.g. obligation to fix budgets in case of externalisation). It is therefore important to have a rather ambitious Platform budget from the start.
Estimated average ERDF/IPA/NDICI budget per project	1,400,000	The average budget per project is expected to increase due to: 1/ higher average number of partners (see below); 2/ more flexibility with pilot actions 3/ more flexibility with follow-up phase based on real costs (although reduced to one year) 4/ inflation. The average ERDF budget in the first call is 1,363,367. The initial assumption is therefore reduced from 1.5 to 1.4 MEUR.
Estimated number of projects	248	Total project budget / average budget per project - Rounded to 240
Estimated number of regions / policy instruments per project	7	This is based on the 2014-2020 average which is not expected to change significantly in the future.
Estimated average number of organisations involved per region (partner & stakeholders)	9	This is based on the 2014-2020 average which is not expected to change significantly in the future (8 stakeholders + 1 partner)
Estimated number of organisations involved per project	63	Average number of regions per project x average number of organisations involved per region
Estimated number of peer reviews organised per year	12	Based on the current experience (XX peer reviews organised by Platform in 2020), Platform could organise up more 20 peer reviews per year. However, since this very much depends on the demand, a more reasonable figure is proposed.

Orange field: *statistics*
Blue field: *automatic calculation*

Estimated number of host organisations involved in Platform peer review per year	12	This corresponds to the estimated number of peer review organised per year. Only the host region is considered for the objective of increasing the capacity of organisations. Even if stakeholder are associated, the core of the peer reviews work is taking place with the host organisation.
Estimated number of policy instruments addressed by Platform per year	12	This again corresponds to the policy instruments addressed in the host region of the peer review.
Estimated timing for 1st call approval	second semester 2022	
Estimated number of 1st call approved projects	60	Based on the current experience, the programme could approve an average of 60 projects through 4 different calls.
Estimated start date of 1st call projects	January 2023	The approval of the programme is expected end of 2021. The first call could then be launched in the first half of 2022 with approval in the second semester 2022.
Estimated timing for 2nd call approval	Second semester 2023	
Estimated number of 2nd call approved projects	60	
Estimated start date of 2nd call projects	January 2024	

Orange field: *statistics*
Blue field: *automatic calculation*

Appendix 2.4 – Extract from the 2014-2020 progress report (PR) monitoring check list

2.2 Results/ Policy instruments			
2.2.1 Policy instruments	**Yes**	**No**	**Comment**
Are the general features filled in correctly for all policy instruments? Is the information on geographical coverage logical? (for PR1 and additional policy instruments only)	☐	☐	
In case a policy change was reported:			
Is the policy change well described? I.e. is the nature of the policy change clear?	☐	☐	
Is there any evidence that the changes have already taken place?	☐	☐	
Is it clear that this change is partly or fully due to the Interreg Europe project?	☐	☐	
If applicable, is the information in line with the information reported in previous PR(s)?	☐	☐	
If applicable: Is the influenced amount realistic? Is this amount clearly justified?	☐	☐	
In case a territorial impact is not reported:			
Is it clear from the description of the policy change that a territorial impact cannot be reported (yet)?	☐	☐	
In case a territorial impact is reported:			
Is the description of the territorial impact understandable and sufficiently detailed?	☐	☐	
Is the reported figure for each self-defined indicator realistic? If applicable, is (are) the new self-defined indicator(s) meaningful?	☐	☐	
In case the policy change reported can be accepted as such (no clarifications needed), please fill in the 'Specifications of the change' section by indicating the nature of the change and its level of attribution to Interreg Europe.	☐	☐	
In case NO policy change was reported yet:			
Are policy developments described for each policy instrument (in principle from PR3)? / Are the main reasons why the policy instrument could not be influenced yet outlined (phase 2 PR)? Is the information provided relevant and clear?	☐	☐	

…..

Appendix 3 – Interreg Europe Control Templates

Interreg Europe provides two control templates

- A standard control certificate (see Appendix 3.1 below)
- A standard control report template including a control checklist (see Appendix 3.2 below).

These templates are used by the controllers during their control work to ensure the application of the same quality standards and to document the control steps properly. These standard templatesare provided in electronic format in the Interreg Europe Portal. The Portal is also the place where the controller fill in and sign these templates for each report.

Appendix 3.1 – Interreg Europe Control Certificate

Project title	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Project acronym	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Project ID	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Reporting period	*(DD.MM.YYYY – DD.MM.YYYY)* *Automatically filled in from Report identification tab in the PP financial report*
Partner Report Number	*Automatically filled in from Report identification tab in the PP financial report*
Name of partner organisation in English language	*Automatically filled in from from most recent name in English in section B in the AF*

	Eligible	**EUR XX.XX**
	amount	*(automatically filled in from the financial overview of the report)*

Based on the documents provided and my verification and professional judgement as a controller,regarding the eligible amount indicated in this Control Certificate, <u>I confirm that</u>:

a. expenditure is in line with European, programme and national eligibility rules and complies with conditions for support of the project and payment as outlined in the subsidy contract;

b. expenditure was actually paid except for costs related to depreciation and simplified cost options;

c. expenditure was incurred and paid (with the exceptions above under "b") within the eligibletime period of the project and by the end of the reporting period and was not previously reported;

d. expenditure based on simplified cost options (if any) is correctly calculated and the calculation method is correctly applied;

e. expenditure reimbursed based on eligible costs actually incurred is either recorded accurately in a separate accounting system or has an adequate accounting code allocated. The necessary audit trail exists, and all was available for inspection;

f. relevant EU/ national/institutional and programme procurement rules were observed;

g. EU and programme publicity rules were followed;

h. co-financed products, services and works were actually delivered or are in progress to bedelivered and expected to be delivered by the project end date;

i. expenditure is related to activities in line with the Application form and the Subsidy contract.

I. Based on the documents provided, my verification and my professional judgement as a controller, I have NOT found any evidence of:

- infringements of rules concerning horizontal principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and sustainable development;

  - double-financing of expenditure through other financial source(s);

II. I hereby confirm that the verification of the project financial report was done precisely and objectively.

III. The control methodology and scope, control work actually done, and eligible and ineligible expenditure per cost category are documented in the Control report and Checklist (based on the programme template). Risk-based control was applied according to the applicable programme methodology. In case of suspicion of fraud, it is reported using the specific programme template.

I and the institution/department I represent are independent from the project's activities and financial management and authorised to carry out the control.

Controller's signature   Controller's signature

Designated control body responsible for verification:	*Automatically filled upon controller's confirmation of the partnerreport*
Name	*Automatically filled upon controller's confirmation of the partnerreport*
Date	*Automatically filled upon controller's confirmation of the partnerreport (date when Certificate is generated)*

Appendix 3.2 – Interreg Europe Control Report and Checklist

Interreg Europe Control Report

1. Project partner progress report	
Project title	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Project acronym	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Project ID	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*
Reporting period	*(DD.MM.YYYY – DD.MM.YYYY)* *Automatically filled in from the Report identification tab of the PP finance report*
Partner Report Number	*Automatically filled in from the Report identification tab of the PP finance report*

2. Project Partner		
Name of partner organisation in English language	Automatically filled in from most recent partner name in English is section B of AF	
Partner type of organisation	□ Public body or body governed by public law (automatically filled based on AF)	□ Body governed by private law (only non-profit) (automatically filled based on AF)
Partner number	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*	
Start date of partner participation in project	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*	
End date of partner participation in project	*Automatically filled in from most recent approved AF at the moment of finance report creation*	

3. Designated Controller	
Control body responsible for the verification[1]	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Name of the controller	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Job title	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Division/Unit/Department	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Address	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Country	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Telephone Number	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*
Email	*Automatically filled in from the profile of the controller signing this document*

4. Verification		
General methodology	□ administrative verification	□ on-the-spot verification

In case of on-the-spot verification: Date(s) of on-the-spot verification	DD.MM.YYYY - DD.MM.YYYY			
In case of on-the-spot verification: Location of on-the-spot verification	premises of project partner	project event/meeting	place of physical project output	Virtual
If a <u>virtual</u> on-the-spot verification is chosen, please explain how it allows to gain sufficient assurance:	*Briefly describe how the virtual on-the-spot verification allowed to gain assurance about the elements usually covered by an on-the-spot verification such as* - *the good functioning of internal processes and systems related to the approval, ordering, accounting, and payment of reported costs* - *the existence and delivery of goods and services & infrastructure and works.*			
The verification is done in line with the programme risk-based verifications methodology. If the Portal selected only a sample of items for your control, but you decided to extend this sample, please describe here how and why the sample was extended.	*The programme will provide the controller with the minimum list of items to be covered by theverification. Depending on the risk-analysis, the selection might be based on a sample. Should you as a controller decide to extend the sample, please briefly describe to which extent the sample was extended and for what reasons (e.g. error found in the initial sample leading to the extension from a sample check to a 100% check or decision to extend the sample for specific items based on professional judgement).*			

Declared (A) (total amount declared in EUR)	Confirmed (B) (total eligible amountin EUR)	Difference (C=A-B) (total amount deductedin EUR)	Confirmed % of Declared (B/A*100)
(Calculated automatically)	*(Calculated automatically)*	*(Calculated automatically)*	*(Calculated automatically)*

5.a Description of findings, observations and limitations	
n.a.	*A summary description of the types of errors found and a reasoning why it is an error. Also add: a clear specification of additional observations and limitations (if any), expressed about the eligibility of some expenditure. In case of suspicion of fraud, please fill in the specific reporting template (annex 4 of the programme manual).*
5.b Follow-up measures from previous report	
n.a.	*Follow-up measures from previous report automatically added here from previous control report*
	Outcome of verification of actual implementation of follow-up measures from previous report to be reported here.
5.c Conclusions and recommendations[6]	
n.a.	*The conclusion takes into consideration the above-mentioned observations/reservations. It also describes the measures implemented to solve the errors detected and it eventually provides recommendations to avoid the repetition of the same types of errors in the future.*
5.d Follow-up measures for the next progress report	
n.a.	*Follow-up measures to be implemented in the next progress report should be described in this section.*

Controller's signature	
Date	*pre-filled from controller's profile*
Name	*pre-filled from controller's profile*
Signature	*filled automatically when report confirmed*

Interreg Europe Control Checklist (Annex to the Control Report)

General checks *Done once and again in case of change at first report (for third point: after first transfer of Interreg or Norwegian funds) and again in case of change*			Comments
Project partner maintains separate accounting records/system, or accounting code, for all transactions related to the project. Ensuring separation of project expenditure for all transactions relating to the project [according to Art. 74 1a(i) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1060]	☐ Yes	☐ No	*If no, has been ticked, either the report cannot be confirmed or a comment is provided that explains what remedial action is undertaken that allows the partner to report nevertheless.*
Mechanisms are in place to exclude double-financing: *e.g.,accounting system avoids the allocation of the same invoice to different projects*	☐ Yes	☐ No	*If no, has been ticked, either the report cannot be confirmed or a comment is provided that explains what remedial action is undertakenthat allows thepartner to report nevertheless.*
The IBAN used for the transfer/receipt of programme funds belongs to the partner organisation.	☐ Yes	☐ No	*If "no" has been ticked, either the report cannot be confirmed or a comment is provided that explains what remedial action is undertakenthat allows thepartner to report nevertheless.*
The project partnership agreement is available and signed by the LP and the partner.	☐ Yes	☐ No	*If no is ticked, the report cannot be confirmed.*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

1. General checks		Accepted			Comments
		Yes	**No**	**n.a.**	
1.1	Costs are correctly recorded in the partner accounting system.	☐	☐	☐	
1.2	The source of the partner's contribution (private or public) is correctly indicated.	☐	☐	☐	
1.3	Costs are directly related to the project and necessary for the development or implementation of the project.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified that costs:* • *have been initially planned in the AF under this cost category OR* • *A written approval of these costs exists from the JS* • *Justified in the Report and within programme flexibility rule*
1.4	Costs are correctly allocated to the relevant cost categories.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected list of expenditures.*
1.5	Costs are declared only once.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected the list of expenditure and verified that expenditures had not been declared twice in different cost categories or in previous reporting periods.*
1.6	Expenditure was incurred and paid in project eligibility period and by the end of the reporting period and supported by proof of payment. **(NOT needed for flat rates, standard scales of unit costs, lump sums).**	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Implementation expenditure is incurred and paid within the starting date of the project set in the subsidy contract and the end of the relevant reporting period.*
1.7	All expenditure has been incurred within the eligible programme area. Whenever expenditure was incurred outside of the eligible programme area, approval from the programme was obtained.	☐	☐	☐	
1.8	Expenditure is supported by invoices or documents of equivalent probative value, which are correct in content and accounting terms. **(NOT needed for Flat rates, the standard scale of unit costs or lump sums).**	☐	☐	☐	
1.9	Ineligible costs according to the Regulations and programme rules are excluded from the Report, e.g.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Art. 64 of Reg.(EU) No 2021/1060 and Art. 38 (3) of Reg (EU) 2021/1059*

	a) fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation; b) costs of gifts; or c) costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate d) interest on debt.				
1.10	There is evidence that co-financed products, services and works were actually delivered or are in progress to be delivered and expected to be delivered by the project end date.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected project evidence provided with the partner report, in particular agendas and signed attendance lists of meetings, written outputs, pictures, etc.; OR performed own research, in particular search on the internet, OR obtained external confirmation of the project's existence, in particular from...' or 'Inspected the project partner and activities on the spot.* *to be always indicated how sufficient assurance was gained (no matter if the check was an on-the-spot check or not)* *Advance payments can be accepted if it is a standard commercial practice and if the services, goods and works are delivered by the end date of the project the latest. It is recommended to formulate follow-up measures to check the final delivery in a future report.*
1.11	***(Only to be verified for LPs):*** The LP transferred the programme funds from the previous periods to the project partners within a timeframe agreed by all partners.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected in the bank statement*
1.12	The total partner budget as stated in the latest approved application form was not exceeded by more than 20% (in line with the programme's budget flexibility rule as outlined in the programme manual) and any excess spending was approved by the lead partner.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified that accumulated partner expenditure is within the partner budget of the latest version of the approved AF. If not, differences have been covered by the budget flexibility or*

					explained/approved by the Lead Partner
1.13	If the partner contribution does not come from the partner's own resources but from an external public source: the total partner contribution has not been exceeded.	☐	☐	☐	
1.14	For partners coming from countries which have not adopted the euro as their currency: the currency exchange rate has been correctly applied.	☐	☐	☐	*Eg. verified that the expenditure has been converted into Euros based on the exchange rate of the Commission applicable in the month the partner report is submitted for verification to the controller in the online monitoring system.*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Deductions (if any) have to be detailed by cost categories.		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2. Eligibility Checks by Cost Categories

2.1 Staff costs [according to Art 39 (1)(a) and (b) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059] If no costs are reported under this cost category, please tick here ☐.	Accepted		Comments
	Yes	No	
2.1.1 Persons that declared staff costs are employees of the project partner or work under a contract considered as an employment document.	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected employment document / work contracts and contracts considered as employment contracts of individuals declaring staff costs (part-time and full-time).*
2.1.2 A document defining the percentage worked on the project (100% or less) (eg. Task assignment letter) is available.	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected documents related to tasks/percentage allocation of employees declaring staff costs (part-time and full-time).*
2.1.3 The percentage worked on the project is correctly applied to calculate the eligible staff costs.	☐	☐	
2.1.4 Staff costs, to which the fixed % is applied, are limited to salary payments and any other costs directly linked to salary payments incurred and paid by the employer for the employee working on the project.	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected, e.g., payrolls/payslips, print-out of accounting system, etc. of employees working on the project (part-time and full-time) and verified that staff costs are based on salary payments plus any other costs directly linked to salary payments incurred and paid by the employer such as employment taxes and social security including pensions provided that they are:* • *(i) fixed in an employment document or by law;* • *(ii) in accordance with the legislation referred to in the employment document and with standard practices in the*

				Yes	No	country and/or organisation where the individual staff member is actually working; and • (iii) not recoverable by the employer.
2.1.5	The fixed percentage worked on the project is plausible in relation to tasks and activities within the project and the job profile of the employee as indicated in the task assignment letter.			☐	☐	
2.1.6	If the staff is involved in several projects, it is ensured that not more than 100% of the time is reported. (eg. task assignment letters for all projects do not exceed 100%).			☐	☐	

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.2 Office and Administration (Simplified Cost Option – flat rate of 15% of eligible direct staff costs) [according to Art 54(b) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1060 and Art 40.2 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059] *If no costs are reported under the cost category "staff" and the relevant box ticked above, this section is not editable.*	**Accepted**		**Comments**
	Yes	No	
2.2.1	The flat rate is calculated correctly (15% of eligible direct staff costs).	☐	☐	*e.g. Recalculated costs using the calculation scheme.*
2.2.2	There is no double declaration of the same cost item in other cost categories.	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified that no-cost items listed in Art. 4 of Delegated Reg. (EU) No 418/2014 had been included in other cost categories (eg. costs related office supplies or postal services).*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.3 Travel and Accommodation (Simplified Cost Option – flat rateof 15% of eligible direct staff costs) [according to Art. 41(5) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059] *This section is not editable* - *if no costs are reported under the cost category "staff" and the relevant box has been ticked under "staff" or* - *if the partner chose to report the travel costs on a real cost basis in the approved application form.*		Accepted		Comments
		Yes	**No**	
2.3.1	The flat rate is calculated correctly (15% of eligible direct staff costs).	☐	☐	*e.g. Recalculated costs using the calculation scheme.*
2.3.2	There is no double declaration of the same cost item in other cost categories.	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified that no-cost items listed in point (52) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1060 had been included in other cost categories. (N.B. The flat rate of 15% covers the travel and accommodation costs for all staff employed by the partner organisation, regardless of their department, specific role in the project, or level of involvement in the project's daily tasks.)*
General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up				
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.			
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.			
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.			

2.3 Travel and Accommodation (Real Costs) [according to Art. 41 (1) to (4) of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059]	Accepted	Comments

		Yes	No	
If no costs are reported under this cost category, please tick here ☐. *This section is not editable if the partner chose to report the travel costs on a flat rate basis in the approved application form.*				
2.3.1	Travels are related to the project activities	☐	☐	
2.3.2	Travel and accommodation costs relate to the partner organisation's staff or natural persons that work under a contract considered as employment contracts of the partner organisation.	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected invoices and documents of equivalent probative value to ensure that costs were incurred by employees or persons working under contracts considered as employment contracts.*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up

Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.4. External Expertise and Services (Real Costs) [according to Art. 42 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059] *If no costs are reported under this cost category, please tick here ☐.*		**Accepted**			**Comments**
		Yes	No	n.a.	
2.4.1	Providers of services or expertise are external to the project partnership.	☐	☐		*e.g. Interviewed the project partner to verify that external expert or service providers are not employees of the project partnership.*
2.4.2	The types of costs listed under the cost categories are eligible according to EU and programme rules.	☐	☐		*e.g. Verified that the types of costs listed under the cost categories are eligible according to Art. 42 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059*
2.4.3	The travel and accommodation expenses of external service providers, stakeholders, associated policy authority representatives or guests invited by the project partners have been recorded under the external expertise and services cost category.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected list of expenditures*
2.4.4	Invoices or documents of equivalent probative value are in line with the contract(s) – or where applicable - with the selected offer - in terms of amount and nature.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected invoices and documents of equivalent probative value to verify that they are in accordance with the contract(s).*

2.4.5	The deliverables are available and in compliance with the contract/agreement and invoices/requests for reimbursement.	☐	☐	☐	
2.4.6	Expenditure related to items planned under this cost category is in line with the descriptions/specifications provided in the application form. If not, a relevant justification is provided.	☐	☐		*e.g. Verified that the items procured are provided for and described in the application form.*
2.4.7	*(In case of experts or services that are NOT exclusively used for the project)* The share allocated to the project is plausible, i.e. calculated according to a fair, equitable and verifiable method.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified that only a share of the expenditure is allocated to the project and that this share is calculated according to a fair, equitable and verifiable method.*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.5 Equipment (Real Costs) [according to Art. 43 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059] *If no costs are reported under this cost category, please tick here ☐ .*	**Accepted**			**Comments**
	Yes	**No**	**n.a.**	
2.5.1	The types of costs listed under the cost categories are eligible according to EU and programme rules.	☐	☐		*e.g. Verified that the types of costs listed under the cost categories are eligible according to Art 43 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059*
2.5.2	Invoices or documents of equivalent probative value are in line with the contract(s) or – were applicable- the selected offer in terms of amount and nature.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Inspected invoices and documents of equivalent probative value to verify that they are in accordance with the contracts in terms of amount and nature.*
2.5.3	Expenditure related to items planned under this cost category is in line with the descriptions/specifications provided in the application form. If not, a relevant justification is provided.	☐	☐		
2.5.4	The method to calculate equipment expenditure (full costs, pro rata, depreciation) is correctly applied in line with EU and programme rules.	☐	☐		*e.g. Verified that the calculation methods used comply with rules*

		Yes	No	n.a.	
					(see programme manual section 6.2.5)
					eg. for pro-rata calculation the share allocated to the project is based on a fair equitable and verifiable calculation method.
					eg. for depreciation: it is in line with Article 67(2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and programme rules
2.5.5	Equipment is available and used for the intended project purpose.	☐	☐	☐	

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.6 Infrastructure and works (Real cost) [according to Art 44 of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1059]		**Accepted**			**Comments**
		Yes	**No**	**n.a.**	
2.6.1	Expenditure related to items planned under this cost category is made in the framework of an approved pilot action and in line with the descriptions/specifications provided in the application form. If the latter is not the case, prior approval from the LP and JS has been obtained.	☐	☐		
2.6.2	Providers of infrastructure and works are external to the project partnership.	☐	☐		
2.6.3	Invoices or documents of equivalent probative value are in line with the contract(s) or – where applicable- the selected offer in terms of amount and nature.	☐	☐		*e.g. Inspected invoices and documents of equivalent probative value to verify that they are in accordance with the contract(s) or selected offers.*
2.6.4	The deliverables related to the infrastructure and works are available, identifiable and in compliance with the	☐	☐	☐	

		Accepted				
	contract/agreement and invoices/requests for reimbursement.					

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up	
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

2.7 Preparation cost (Lump sum covering several cost categories). *(Only to be displayed and verified if the partner is a LP)*		Accepted		Comments
		Yes	No	
2.7.1	The amount of the lump sum (EUR 17,500) is correctly indicated (in line with the applicable programme, national and internal rules of the partner organisation).	☐	☐	
General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up				
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.			
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.			
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.			

3. Compliance with Information and publicity requirements [according to Annex IX of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1060 and Art 46 and 47 of Reg. (EU) 2021/1060.		Accepted			Comments
		Yes	No	n.a	
3.1	Information and publicity rules of the EU were complied with.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g., Inspected project publicity items, including project poster, billboard/plaque (if applicable), project videos, roll-up(s), brochures, agendas of conferences, studies and deliverables to ensure they meet the publicity requirements outlined in Annex IX of Reg. (EU) No 2021/1060 and section 7.1.2 of the programme manual.*

				NB. Project websites are hosted by the programme and monitored by the Joint Secretariat in terms of publicity requirements, content and regular updates. Nonetheless, controllers should check if information about the project is published on the partner's official institutional website, where such a website exists, or otherwise on their social media sites, highlighting the financial support of the EU (In accordance with paragraph 4 (a) of Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059)

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up
Deductions (if any) have to be detailed by cost category.

Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

4. Compliance with other EU rules		**Accepted**			**Comments**
		Yes	**No**	**n.a.**	
4.1	There is no evidence that the project activities do not comply with the EU horizontal principle of sustainable development. [according to Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU)]	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Compared the partner report to the AF and verified that activities are in line with the AF and do not raise any new issues.*
4.2	In case of pilot actions: There is no evidence that equipment purchased and any infrastructure and works does not comply with EU and national legislation in terms of environmental impacts, required permits, etc.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Verified based on my professional judgement as a controller that compulsory requirements set by the EU and national legislation related to respective equipment are fulfilled (e.g. environmental impacts, permits, etc.).*

4.3	Based on the available information, there is no evidence that the project activities do not comply with the EU horizontal principles of gender equality and non-discrimination.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Compared the partner report to the AF and verified that activities are in line with the AF and do not raise any new issues.*
4.4	Based on the available information the project activities comply with EU and programme rules on State aid.	☐	☐	☐	*e.g. Compared the partner report to the AF and verified that activities are in line with the AF, and do not raise any new issues (eg. partner is not 'in difficulty').* *If aid is not granted under GBER article 20:* *e.g. Verified that the project partner does not exceed the de minimis threshold (if covered by de minimis).* *e.g.: in case of indirect state aid, checked that* • *the completed de minimis self-declaration is available and get a confirmation that the award letter has been sent to the beneficiary or* • *the threshold stated in GBER article 20a is not exceeded.*

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up

Deductions (if any) have to be detailed by cost category.

Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

5 Compliance with public procurement rules	Accepted			Comments
Public procurement rules and principles are applicable to all public authorities and bodies governed by public law and therefore also apply in the context of their participation in an Interreg Europe project. *Private non-profit bodies participating in an Interreg Europe project must also be able to prove how they awarded project-related contracts in compliance with the relevant national rules and guidelines as well as their own internal rules and the principle of sound financial management. The strictest rules apply.* *See also section 6.5 in the programme manual.*	**Yes**	**No**	**n.a**	
5.1	EU, national and any other applicable public or private procurement rules were observed, *e.g.* *Complies with the applicable rules;* *Publicity requirement were respected;* *The principles of transparency, Non-discrimination, Equal treatment, effective competition has been complied with;* *There was a clear distinction between selection and award criteria in the evaluation of the bids;* *Selection and award criteria and required technical specifications and national permits are transparent, nondiscriminatory and ensure equal treatment;*	☐	☐	☐	

	Decisions are properly documented and justified. *No cases of actual or potential conflict of interest came to the attention of the controller, or the conflict of interest policy was followed where applicable*				
5.2	The procurement procedure is documented and available *e.g.,* *Initial cost estimate made by the project partner to identify the applicable public or private procurement procedure* *Market research, Request for quote/offers, or procurement publication/notice* *Terms of reference (TOR)* *Offers/quotes received* *Report on assessment of bids (evaluation/selection report)* *Information on acceptance and rejection (notification of bidders)* *Legal remedies / contradictory procedure / complaints* *The contract including any amendments and in line with the selected offer, etc.*	☐	☐	☐	
5.3	There is no evidence of artificial splitting of the contract objective/value.	☐	☐	☐	
5.4	If applicable, any amendment of the contract is in line with the relevant public or private procurement rules without any relevant impact on the validity of the initial procurement procedure. (Only if the contract was amended or extended).	☐	☐	☐	
5.5	If the partner organisation decided to award the contract directly (negotiated procedure without prior publication), the decision is justified and documented. *For direct awards because of* • *Urgency: it is proven that the urgency is due to unforeseeable circumstances.* • *Technical/exclusivity reasons: it is ruled out (based on objective evidence) that any other supplier is capable of providing the supplies, works or services.), etc.*	☐	☐	☐	
5.6	The invoices have been issued and payments have been done in respect of the products and services delivered and the tender (in terms of nature, procurement budget, amounts fixed in the contract/accepted offer).	☐	☐	☐	
5.7	The procurement list in the Portal is properly filled in. *e.g., It includes all contracts above EUR 10,000.* *For public procurements above EU thresholds:* *- beneficial owners of private contractors are identified* *- subcontracts of EUR 50,000 or more are listed.* *NB: The beneficial owner(s) of an organisation is/are the individual(s) that ultimately own(s) or control(s) the organisation. The notion of "Beneficial owners" is further defined in article 3(6) of Directive (EU) N°2015/849 (and potentially in national legislations transposing this Directive).*	☐	☐	☐	

General comments, recommendations, points to follow-up		
Deductions (if any) have to detailed by cost category.		
Description of findings, observations and limitations	☐ n.a.	
Conclusions and recommendations	☐ n.a.	
Follow up measures for the next progress report	☐ n.a.	

Controller's signature	
Designated control body responsible for verification	*pre-filled from controller's profile*
Name	*pre-filled from controller's profile*
Date	*filled automatically when report confirmed*

Appendix 4 – Information on potential or confirmed fraud

(to be sent by controllers to the Joint Secretariat Financial Control and Audit Officer whenever they come across such cases)

I hereby inform the managing authority of the Interreg Europe programme that, based on the provided documents, on my verification and my professional judgement as a financial controller, I have become aware of potential or confirmed fraud for the following project beneficiary:

Project ID number	
Project acronym	
Project title	
Partner number	
Name of partner organisation in EN	

1. Typology of potential or confirmed fraud

Please explain in detail the nature of potential or confirmed fraud that you wish to inform the programme about (Eg. conflict of interests, fake declarations, double funding, etc.).

2. Financial perimeter of the potential or confirmed fraud

Concerned partner report(s)	
Concerned cost categories	
Amount of expenditure concerned (in EUR)	

3. Circumstances leading to a situation of potential or confirmed fraud

Please explain in detail the reasons/circumstances leading you to suspect the existence of potentialfraud or to report a confirmed fraud case for this specific project beneficiary (i.e. Why do you think there may be fraud? / How did you become aware of the potential/confirmed fraud?).

For example, in case of suspicion of conflict of interest, please indicate how you became aware about the potential conflict of interest.

Please also include below:

- *the date of detection of the potential/confirmed fraud*
- *the date when, or period during which, the potential/confirmed fraud was committed*

Please provide detailed facts related to the potential or confirmed fraud

For example, in case of a suspicion of conflict of interest, please indicate the persons and organisations concerned and why you suspect that these persons may be in a situation of conflict of interest. Provide as much information as possible on the type of situation of conflict of interest at stake (eg Family link, economic interest, etc.).

In case of established fraud, please make sure to also include a reference to the competent authority/court decision establishing the fraud (and if possible attach a copy of the relevant document).

Please indicate the actions you already undertook to analyse the specific case.

Please also specify if you reported this potential or confirmed fraud to any other competent authority and if any administrative or judicial proceedings in relation to this case has been initiated.

For example, in case of suspicion of conflict of interest, provide information about the checks you did to establish the potential conflict of interest situation and to control the way it was (or not) dealt with by the partner organisation. Please briefly explain why you think there may be fraud.

4. Potential impact of the potential or confirmed fraud outside the project

If applicable, please list other EU co-funded programmes and projects in which the same beneficiaryis involved (to your knowledge)
Please add any complementary indication you deem useful to identify and limit the impact of thepotential or confirmed fraud, including any other following actions deemed necessary.

I hereby declare that my assessment is based on facts that I have seen during my verification of the expenditure claim.

I am aware that the Interreg Europe programme and national competent bodies may use these facts to undertake further investigations which could lead to appropriate administrative and/or legal actions in relation to suspected unlawful activity.

Controller's Name and Surname	
Controller's Organisation	
Location	
Date	
Controller's signature	

Notes

Notes

Interreg Europe

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