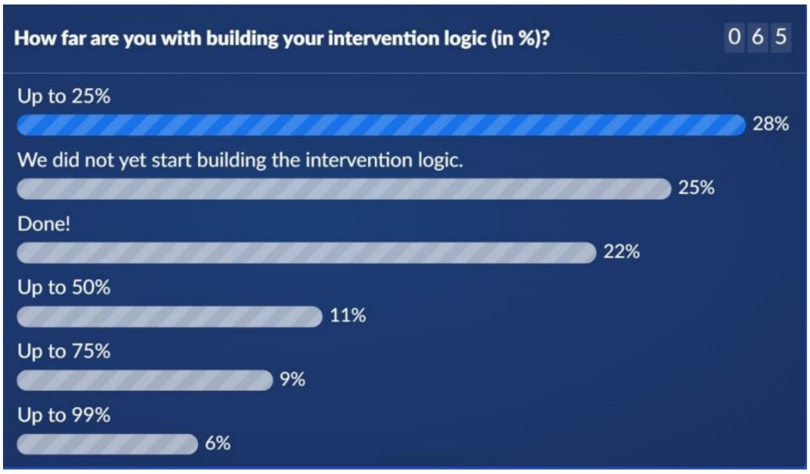
Q&A: ‘Hands on the Intervention Logic (IL)’

23 September (14.000-16.15 CET), online

- ***Unit of Evaluation and European Semester, DG REGIO:*** *Irina Ciocirlan, David Alba, John Walsh*
- ***Unit D2, DG Regio:*** *Dorota Witoldson*
- ***Interreg programme examples:***
    - *Merike Niitepõld, Interreg Central Baltic programme*
    - *Nuno Madeira, Interreg Alpine Space programme*
- ***Interact Team:*** *Daniela Minichberger, Besiana Ninka, Bernhard Schausberger, Philipp Schwartz*

[Disclaimer: This document has been prepared by Interact following discussions with the geographical services of DG Regio. this is not an official document of the European Commission or an official position of the EC. The present document does not to any extent interfere with the process of the legal negotiations on the proposal. In particular, it does not prejudge the outcome of the on-going negotiations on the post-2020 Regulation between the European Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament.]

How far are the participating programmes with building their IL in %?



Q&A session on Intervention Logic (IL)

General questions related to the Intervention Logic

Q1: Is it possible that a programme designs its own specific objectives?
A: This is not expected by the regulation nor by SFC. Both policy objectives and specific objectives will be drop-down menus in the system.

Q2: How to programme Interreg Specific Objectives?
A: The Interreg-specific Objectives are equal to any PO. It should be a separate programme priority with its own strategic rationale. Unlike the POs, specific objectives for Interreg-specific Objectives are not explicitly mentioned in the draft Interreg regulation. However, for pragmatic reasons, the actions listed in Article 14 of the draft ETC regulation will be considered as specific objectives.

Thus, ISO 1 "Better cooperation governance" covers the following "specific objectives":

1. Building institutional capacity of public authorities
2. Legal and administrative cooperation
3. People-to-people actions for increased trust
4. Building institutional capacity to manage macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies
5. Support for democracy and civil society
6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance

ISO 2 has 4 "specific objectives":

1. Border management infrastructure
2. Mobility and migration management
3. Protection and integration of migrants (including refugees)
4. Other actions to contribute to a safer and more secure Europe

In both cases, cooperation programmes may also choose No. 6. ("Other actions") if they, for example, intend to merge several of the proposed eligible actions, or have other ideas when respecting the spirit of the eligible actions proposed to them.

Q3: Priority axes: where is the position of priorities in the intervention logic - before or after the selection of POs?
A: You select the policy objective, and then you customise the meaning of it to the intents of your programme. As a basic rule, a priority axis cannot deal with more than one policy objective (PO). However, you could have more than one priority axes addressing the same PO – such as in the case of PO 2 covering a wide range of issues: you might decide to structure it into more than one priority axis. So, there is a certain flexibility in it but within limits.

Q4: For PO4, can we consider that Interreg-specific objectives (SO) cover a wider range of interventions, so that we do not have to select in addition the SO under PO 4 in the ERDF Regulation?
A: It is a bit difficult to reply to the question right now because the Trilogues are on-going and we do not have the final wording. In addition to the specific objectives for ERDF [as set out in the ERDF Regulation], the ERDF and where applicable, the external financing instrument of the Union shall also contribute to the specific objectives of ESF through joint actions

As regards indicators for PO 4: the proposed regulation (Table 2 of Annex I to the ERDF Regulation) defines Interreg common indicators that are available to be used for the ISO, including the Interreg SOs under PO4. The indicators in policy objective 4 are rather more relevant for the mainstream ERDF programmes, i.e. under the 'Investments for Growth and Jobs' goal. We would recommend to make use primarily of the Interreg common indicators and secondarily, as deemed relevant for the intervention logic, the ERDF indicators marked with * from Table 1 of the ERDF Regulation.

Also, the ESF+ indicators are largely speaking not suitable for the interventions in Interreg. It would be quite a burden for you to try to implement the ESF indicator set. It works quite differently, as the reporting format is different from the one used in ERDF programmes (you would have to collect data from the beneficiaries respectively the recipients). The reporting templates which will apply to Interreg are the ERDF output and result indicator templates. The ESF+ common indicators reporting templates will not be available for Interreg programmes.

Q5: What does "developing infrastructure" mean in the context of education or health? Can it refer only to the purchase of equipment?
A: For first hints on that please see
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/conferences/interreg-annual-event-2020/).
It is possible to combine ERDF type of actions [see Article 2 (1) (d) ERDF draft Regulation] with ESF+ type of actions [see Article 4 (1) ESF Regulation].

Indicators

Q6: Indicator fiches: who is going to determine whether the use of an indicator by the programme (if diverging) is more respectively less restrictive than the fiches?
A: This judgment can only be made by the programme authorities. You have the fiches, you will report based on the fiches. We work under the assumption that your interpretation of the indicator is compliant with the fiches if you select a common indicator. You can be more restrictive with your interpretation of the information included in the fiches and still use the common indicator. If you choose a broader interpretation than that included in the fiches, please do not use the common indicator but rather define a programme specific one- The Commission Services will need the methodological document in order to assess the suitability and completeness of the indicators chosen for the programme and associated targets. There might be cases when we will question targets seemingly implausible for us: e.g., if an Interreg programme tells us that they are likely to support 10.000 enterprises with grants, while the financial envelope of the action is insufficient to do so.

Q7: How many common indicators per SO are recommended (recommended maximum number)? How many programme specific indicators (created by the programme, or more programmes) are acceptable?
A: There is no formula to determine the appropriate number of indicators to be used under a certain SO. The judgment should be made rather on the intervention logic so that the indicators proposed represent and capture the outputs and results of envisioned actions. Is the intervention logic reflecting the achievements of your programme in relation to the objectives and corresponding actions defined? You should use indicators that are relevant for the actions in the specific objective (SO). You should focus on selecting or defining indicators that are meaningful for the programme and for the measurement of cooperation and/or the measurement of the direct physical deliverables that are being funded by joint actions.

There are choices to be made by the programme authorities. The EC would not encourage the use of numerous indicators per SO, but would like to see a focused approached reflecting the most relevant outputs and results from the implementation and financial points of view. We are conscious of the administrative burden entailed by the use of a large number of indicators, thus the programme authorities should select the indicators which are the most relevant for the programme strategy.

If especially in a smaller programme, a SO has too many indicators that might indicate a serious flaw in the intervention logic. If you really need so many common or programme specific indicators and you think it is justified you have to document the assumptions and the methodology for it in the methodological document. However, you also have to raise yourself the question: is my programme focused enough?

Q8: Can we use common indicators established for policy objectives 1 to 5 for Interreg Specific objectives?
A: No, the ERDF common indicators from Table 1 of Annex I to the ERDF regulation are meant to be used only in PO1 –PO5. The Interreg common indicators can be used for the Interreg-specific objectives (ISOs). These are the suitable ones to demonstrate achievements in terms of governance for cooperation.

Q9: What you think about the approach intended for the Alpine Space to use maybe one indicator throughout all specific objectives?
A: In principle, there is no objection. Our focus is on the relevance of the indicator system to capture the programme achievements. The chosen indicator, common indicator RCO118, could indeed be relevant since Alpine Space is a transnational programme and involved in multi-level governance. In addition, there is a macro-regional strategy in place being fairly congruent with the programme territory. Therefore, it could indeed be highly relevant for most of the actions, most of the projects, i.e. most of the cooperation actions the programme will be involved in. In principle, we would not have an objection to that. If the indicator is indeed relevant, in all planned SOs, then you should use it and it will be a good measure of

your implementation. In the type of programmes such as Alpine Space, it might be easier to use this kind of overreaching indicator rather than in some other programmes serving a more diversified strategy portfolio.

Finally, we want to stress that it should not be the indicators driving the programme, it should be the programme intervention logic driving the indicators. We would prefer if there is a holistic programme logic, which is further justified through an overarching objective of the programme representative for all SOs. That means that we would appreciate seeing programmes which use focused thinking and planning.

Q10: Indicators to be measured 6 months after project end - is this still planned to be included? Some common result indicators should be measured 1 year after the project ends. Will the project need to continue to monitor this? Are there other suggestions (e.g. similar to the practice in the ESF)?

A: The six months terminology was discussed in the first version of the fiches. In the second version that was distributed in June 2020 in most cases, we have a choice between measurement during or after project implementation. After project completion meaning at project completion or up to one year after project completion. This is clearly indicated in the respective fiches in terms of the time measurement. Two common result indicators should be measured at project completion. These are RCR81 Completion of joint training schemes and RCR83 Persons covered by joint administrative or legal agreements signed. For the other common result indicators, the measurement can be made during project implementation or up to one year after the project completion.

In some cases, it might make more sense, i.e. to capture higher values, to wait for six months after project completion. It is not our intention to extend the duration of the projects. In your agreement with the beneficiaries you could make this clear with them from the beginning. The beneficiaries might be willing to come back and inform you afterward what happened, or to join a small, quick, and targeted survey among partners.

Q11: If result indicators measure the result for beneficiaries, isn’t the baseline always zer0 as this very group as such was not targeted before?

A: It depends on the indicator. It is defined for each indicator in the indicator fiches whether a baseline different than zero would be possible or not. However, in some cases, there are reasons why a baseline is requested: e.g. in the field of energy efficiency, your Interreg programmes might have had cooperation between 20 beneficiaries in a programme area in the current period. The objective of the new programme is to extend the number of beneficiaries participating, i.e. for example the number of municipalities. In such cases it makes sense to know what the baseline was in 2020; You know how many municipalities or energy agencies already cooperated, and your objective of the 2021-2027 programme is to increase the outreach for shared learning to a wider group of municipalities. That would be a case where you might establish a baseline and formulate your target accordingly. In the example mentioned above our example, you already know these 20 beneficiaries cooperated, but you plan to increase that number to 40 entities cooperating in the field of energy efficiency.

Please bear in mind, that the SO tells us part of the story – if you are using common indicators for Interreg the SO tells us in which field cooperation takes place. If the intervention field is quite narrowly defined and cooperation across borders quite new, you might be able to establish a baseline other than zer0 with reasonable efforts. For ISO 1 for example it might not be that easy since it is a thematically open policy intervention.

It may be true that the baseline is often zero but we encourage you to look into it more closely, It depends on the nature of the actions, the objectives for the forthcoming period, and the beneficiaries respectively the target groups of the programme in previous funding periods.

Q12: If there is no matching result indicator to output: do you recommend to use another common result indicator or to develop a programme specific one?
A: There are logical links, but no mandatory links between output and result indicators. The EC aims to create a system, which allows addressing of the very different circumstances of the programmes. It is possible that several outputs from several actions could be covered by one result indicator. The real question, the programmes have to answer is whether the actions in the programmes are properly captured by both the output indicators and the result indicators. You should make sure that you are not missing anything significantly relevant. A common indicator should not be selected to capture the outputs and results of only one project unless that project entails a significant financial envelope when compared to the total budget of the programme.

Q13: Is it possible to use only the common indicators for Interreg for policy objectives (POs) 1-5 (thus not choosing any of the indicators provided for the PO)?
A: Yes, we intend to make it possible to use the common indicators for Interreg across all POs. To give you one example: If you are supporting networking among agencies supporting SMEs, e.g. in the tourism sector but you are not directly supporting SMEs, then the indicators you need are the common indicators for Interreg on the dimensions of cooperation such as participations, training, action plans and so on.

However, if you are giving directly significant support to SMEs, then you could think of using e.g. a relevant common indicator designed for PO 1. For your decision, please make a judgement on the likelihood to achieve a critical mass. If you are only planning to support 10 or 20 enterprises don't use the indicator RCO01 on 'the number of enterprises supported', because that's not going to help you tell the story of cooperation under the programme. Definitely the focus, to begin with, should be on the Interreg common indicators. If the focus is mainly on the cooperation and not on 'physical achievements' like the number of SMEs you are supporting, it would be more relevant to measure the cooperation dimension. If in your needs and objectives it is explicit that you want to cover a certain percentage or certain type of SMEs from your programme area, then you might want to think of measuring that. It is always a case-by-case decision based on sound judgement.

__Performance Framework__

Q14: Performance framework: as the programmes are working with the same indicators, is there any attempt to harmonise the methodology for the measurement of indicators?
A: The indicator fiches should be the starting point for the programmes when they are choosing, and also later on when they are discussing how those indicators will be used by the projects. There are methodological requirements in there in terms of definition, in terms of data collection, in terms of time measurement, in terms of aggregation.

For the output indicators, if a similar programme-specific output indicator has already been used in the 2014-2020 period and you continue to use it an approach for measurement should be in place and the necessary information for target-setting should be available in your monitoring system. For the common indicators, the fiches define the indicator, and how to measure it but cannot provide a unified method for target-setting. A similar logic applies to the result indicators but please note that the concept and logic for the result indicators are entirely different for the new period.

The challenge for the programmes is that the beneficiaries also have to understand the fiches. They have to understand what they are asked for in terms of data reporting and you have to be clear about the demarcation lines between what is reported under different indicators.

Q15: When does the methodology paper need to be ready for (at programme development stage or right before implementation starts?) What about the performance framework?
A: The performance framework is the full system of indicators, according to the CPR. The methodology document is meant to help us understand, among others, to what extent the proposed indicators cover the planned actions. In the new period 2021-2207 the performance framework includes all indicators (differently from the 2014-2020 period when the performance framework referred only to a subset of indicators defined by the programmes), The methodology for the establishment of the performance framework should include:

(a) the criteria applied by the Member State to select indicators;
(b) data or evidence used, data quality assurance, and the calculation method;
(c) factors that may influence the achievement of the milestones and targets and how they've been taken into account

It is very challenging to develop a proper intervention logic if you do not have the elements from which you build the methodological document. It is very hard for the Commission Services to judge on your intervention logic without having the methodological document, which explains the broader context of the programmes intervention logic including the financial coverage of the selected indicators and assumptions underlying the target-setting. From a practical point of view, the EC expects that the methodological document will be made available by the programme authorities during the negotiation process when a developed draft of the programme will be discussed.

Q16: What form should the Methodology Paper take?
A: The methodological document should describe all indicators selected by the programme and along with the specific objectives. In the examples that the EC has shared with the programme authorities during the Evaluation Network meetings and Interact, you will see the assumptions, the underlying data, the values, the calculations, the reasons for choosing these indicators, and the coverage of those indicators. There is no formal template planned, or any implementing regulation that further defines it. Nevertheless, the stylised examples of the methodological document presented during the Evaluation Network meetings and Interact events could be used as inspiration.

Q17: In 2014-20 key implementation steps were used to measure the progress, as projects reached outputs only once closed. Are key implementation steps planned or possible for 2021-27?
A: The regulation does not propose key implementation steps or financial milestones for the performance framework in 2021-2027. This was part of the simplification effort to make the performance framework less mechanical and to simplify it. We are not expecting to see key implementation steps as indicators. We prefer that programmes focus on output and result indicators and try to set reasonable milestone values.

Q18: For how many years should the milestones be set? (Targets for 7 years)
A: There is only one milestone, which is set for the end of 2024 because the mid-term review takes place in 2025. The targets should cover the entire programming period, i.e. the seven budgetary years, and can be referred to as 2029 targets, if n+2 rule is retained, as it is currently proposed by the draft regulation.

<u>Impact</u>

Q19: Are there any proposals on how to measure real impact by the projects, given the re-focus of result indicators on direct results in the new period. i.e. going away from measuring impact?
A: That is a matter related to evaluation. The articles referring to evaluation activities from the CPR require the ex-post measurement of the impact of the programme. The programmes could try to define an impact indicator at the programming phase, should they desire so. The impact indicator would need to be relevant, a proxy of your programme objectives. However, the programmes are not requested to do this at the programming stage. The programmes should primarily understand what changes you will manage to achieve at the level of the beneficiaries, and how this would contribute to an impact at programme level.

This is part of the fundamental logic of evaluation in general, it did not change from the previous period and the criteria are very similar. When we talk about ‘impact’ for the period post-2020, we talk about the same concept of impact as for the current period. When we talk about impact evaluations, we talk about the same type of evaluations at the level of programmes and their areas. The evaluation plan leaves room for manoeuvring how to set it up. It could be evaluations covering several programmes or specific topics across several programmes. However, in the end, an assessment for each programme is required.

<u>IP template</u>

Q20: Referring to the IP template for the result indicators, what does “reference year” mean?
A: The reference year is the year when the baseline was calculated. If you are setting a baseline for a result indicator, then it is likely to be a rather recent year.

Q21: What are the correlations between intervention fields and specific objectives referring to an excel sheet from the Commission?
A: We did provide a mapping of the indicators to the specific objectives and an indicative mapping of the categorising intervention fields to the specific objectives. Now, in relation to the intervention fields, this is purely to help the programmes to find the most likely relevant intervention fields. The mapping of the intervention fields to the specific objectives is not a binding one. It is not mandatory and its use will not be enforced. It is purely to support the member states in easily finding relevant intervention fields.

<u>Reporting:</u>

Q22: Is it necessary to wait until the project is completed to report data for the indicators to the EC? Knowing this information is important for setting milestones. Will we report only fully implemented projects or is partially implemented also possible?
A: What we are interested in is the achievement of the indicator value. For example, if you are planning to support 30 enterprises directly as part of a joint action in a project, over three years, and in the first year you support 5 of them or 10 of them, you can report that as a (partial) achievement. The indicator value itself should be achieved. It is clear that the approach for reporting achievements is bound to several aspects. We have to consider the definition of operations in the different types of programmes (ERDF, ESF) and the many different types of actions, the nature of the indicators (such as e.g. support to 10 enterprises or built 10 kilometres, or renovated 10 buildings) and average delivery times for each of the different actions. For example, you do not only have to look at the cost/output ratio, but you also have to look at the average or specific delivery times – the latter in particular in case of larger infrastructure investments.

You need to document your assumptions for setting the interim milestones in the same way as for setting the final targets. This should be based on the previous experience of the programmes.

Q23: Now we don't have the annual implementation reports anymore. What's the difference when it comes to reporting? What to do with the two months reporting?
A: Currently, the Council draft of the regulation indicates that the financial reporting shall be made every four months, while the reporting of indicators values is foreseen twice a year (though as an outcome of the negotiations the frequency of reporting might still change).

You have to report the latest data available. Obviously, especially at the programme start, you will have limited information to report. Until now, we raised the questions regarding monitoring data once per year in the annual implementation report (AIR), which was a lengthy process. Now we do not have this overhead of AIRs, but we will ask for updates on a continuous basis. So, if we see implausible data being reported to the EC during this regular reporting, or we see, for example, that nothing is being reported where we would expect that the programme should start to develop, to deliver something, then we will raise questions. It is a switch to continuous monitoring.

Evaluation Plan

Q24: Will there be a guidance on drafting the evaluation plan? When should it be developed, and how detailed should it be?
A: The EC's philosophy for evaluation planning and evaluations, in general, did not change too much. There are a few questions, which we need to clarify, because of the introduction of the direct result indicators. Overall, you can use the structure, which is in the guidance for 14-20 to develop your evaluation plans. I think here the question will be really on the timing when you would like to do these evaluations.
Tip: For more information check out the Interact online course 'what to consider for a good start to 2020+, chapter Evaluation Plan

Mid-term review

Q25: The Programme will be "reviewed" mid-term, but not only on the basis of the Performance Framework. What will the programmes be assessed against?
As stated in Art. 14 of the draft CPR the mid-term review is expected to take into account the following elements:

a. the challenges identified in relevant country-specific recommendations adopted in 2024;
b. the socio-economic situation of the Member State or region concerned;
c. the progress in achieving the milestones;
d. the outcome of the technical adjustment as set out in Article 104(2), where applicable

Costs of implementing indicator system

Q27: Please detail what is meant by: costs of implementing indicator system and collection by beneficiaries is an eligible cost
When project beneficiaries have costs that are linked to the reporting needs, including costs for setting the monitoring system, collecting the data, and reporting, those costs should be considered as eligible costs under the projects.

Exchange among TN programmes on MRS

Q28: Is RCO118 relevant across all SOs and not only ISO1?
Yes, RCO118 is relevant for programmes covered by a macro-regional strategy – which is the case of the Alpine Space programme. It is relevant across all SOs and can be used under ISO2, as long as the intervention logic and selected actions justify the use of RCO118.

Exchange on indicators for ISO 2

Q29: ISO 2 A safer and more secure EUROPE - is there any willingness to propose Interreg specific result indicator reflecting results in this field of intervention? Are there any common indicators that can be used for investments in ISO2?
In theory, all the Interreg common indicators could be used across all the ISOs. The selection of indicators is directly dependant on the actions proposed. The possible logical links between common output and result indicators are indicated in the indicator fiches.

Further references

Interact Online course:
What to consider for a good start to 2020+
https://learning.interact-eu.net/course/evaluation-what-to-consider-for-a-good-start-to-2020/

Thematic Platform 'results and evaluation':
- Please share your methodology papers in the Thematic Platform 'results and evaluation'. There you can also find the ones from the Regio evaluation network with national, with member states
- Fiches
- If you would like to join the Interact Thematic network 'Results and Evaluation', please send an e-mail to Daniela.minichberger@interact-eu.net

Harmonisation of Programme specific indicators:
Interact would support groups of programmes who join to develop maybe one or the other programme specific indicators if there is a clear need for it. It's clear that if several programmes would like to have specific indicators, it's still better that several programmes then use a programme specific indicator instead of having single programmes developing their own very specific one.. For example colleagues from transnational programmes started after the event in January to work on a result indicator on capacity building.