

# Q&A Evaluation 2014-2020

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The 'Q&A Evaluation 2014-2020' is a compilation of the two former Interact documents 'Q&A Evaluation Plan' and 'Q&A Impact Evaluations'. The aim of this practical document is to support the planning and implementation of evaluations for Interreg programmes in that period.

The 'Q&A Evaluation 2014-2020' document is divided into three main chapters, whereby the first chapter includes general information, the second chapter focuses on the drafting of an evaluation plan, and the last one deals with issues related to impact evaluations.

The 'Q&A Evaluation 2014-2020' document summarises:

- the most important information related to planning and implementation evaluations for Interreg programmes in the period 2014-2020
- a set of questions, which were discussed in the context of evaluation seminars run by Interact between December 2014 and November 2015<sup>1</sup>
- the feedback and tips, which were shared by the Interreg programmes and DG Regio during the seminars (in this document "*Tips from the Interreg programmes*", "*Answer by DG Regio*").

The 'Q&A Evaluation 2014-2020' is considered a **working paper** and Interact will continuously update this document. Please feel free to contact Daniela Minichberger ([daniela.minichberger@interact-eu.net](mailto:daniela.minichberger@interact-eu.net)) if you would like to comment or contribute to the document.

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*The information and views set out in this Interact Q&A document reflect Interact's opinions. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this Q&A document lies entirely with Interact.*

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<sup>1</sup> Following Interact evaluation seminars took place so far: Evaluation Plan Event, 2 December 2014, London / Evaluation Plan Event, 24 February 2015, Paris / Impact Evaluation Event, 12 June 2015, Budapest / Evaluation Event for Transnational Programmes, 25 September 2015, Vienna / Evaluation Event for Cross-border Programmes, 12 November 2015, Vienna

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## 1. General information on evaluation in 2014-2020

### 1.1. Basic concepts of evaluation in 2014-2020

#### What is meant by result-orientation?

In the programming period 2014-2020, Cohesion Policy pursues a result-oriented policy in order to better contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy. For the programmes, including the Interreg programmes that means to move away from the focus on the absorption of funds to a clearer articulation of the results, namely a result-oriented approach based on the theory of change: The Interreg programme interventions have to be more specific on the aim to change the situation in a region/area for a particular target group. The clear articulation of the intervention logic should help the Interreg programmes in achieving what they intend to achieve/change.

This stronger focus on achieving the (expected) results is also the basis for the monitoring and evaluation.

#### What is theory of change?

The Theory of Change<sup>2</sup> is a programme theory approach concerned with going beyond input- output descriptions and seeking to understand the theories of actors with regard to programme interventions and why they should work. As a planning tool the Theory of Change helps to come up with the logic of the programme (to reconstruct the chain that links objectives of the programme, the interventions funded, the outputs achieved and the contribution of the interventions to these results):

- Begin with a situation analysis (current situation)
- Needs analysis (intended situation)
- Develop a theory how to get from the current situation to the intended situation
- Clarify which aspect of the problem the intervention will address: define activities, outcomes, result and impact

### 1.2. Legal Requirements

#### What is the Regulatory Framework for implementing evaluations in 2014-2020?

The evaluations should comply with the following legal framework and documents:

- Common Provision Regulation (CPR)<sup>3</sup>, especially Preamble 54; Article 56 (Evaluation during the programming period); Article 110 (Monitoring and Evaluation. Functions of the monitoring committee); Article 114 (Evaluation).
- ETC regulation<sup>4</sup>, including Preamble 26; Article 14 (Implementation Reports);

More information on further guidance documents can be found in [Annex 1](#).

2. More details of the Theory of Change can be found in Evalsed Sourcebook: Method and Techniques, p. 54f.

3 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down the general provision on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006;(Common Provision Regulation)

4 Regulation (EU) 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal (ETC Regulation)

### 1.3. Evaluations: why, what and how?

#### Which evaluations are legally required?

- *At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority. (Art. 56(3) CPR)<sup>5</sup>*
- *Evaluations shall be carried out to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes, as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The impact of the programmes shall be evaluated in the light of the mission of each ESI fund, in relation to the targets under the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and, having regard to the size of the programme, in relation to GDP and unemployment in the programme area concerned, where appropriate. (Art. 54(1) CPR)*

#### What evaluations might be good to have in order to feed into fulfil the reporting requirements of a programme?

Evaluations can be useful tool to collect data for the reporting:

Referring to the ETC Regulation<sup>6</sup>, in the Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019 the following information shall be set out and assessed

- a.) progress in implementation of the evaluation plan and follow-up given to the findings of the evaluation*
- b.) the results of the information and publicity measures carried out under the communication strategy*
- c.) the involvement of the partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the cooperation programme*

Referring to ETC Regulation<sup>7</sup> for Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019 the following information may be assessed:

- a.) progress in the implementation of the integrated approach to territorial development, including sustainable urban development, and community-led local development under the cooperation programme;*
- b.) progress in the implementation of actions to reinforce the capacity of authorities and beneficiaries to administer and to use the ERDF;*
- c.) where appropriate, the contribution to macro-regional and sea basin strategies;*
- d.) the specific actions taken to promote equality between men and women and to promote non-discrimination, in particular accessibility for persons with disabilities, and the arrangements implemented to ensure the integration of gender perspective in the cooperation programme and operations;*
- e.) actions taken to promote sustainable development;*
- f.) progress in the implementation of actions in the field of social innovation.*

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the Q&A quotes of articles or documents will be written in *cursive*.

<sup>6</sup> Art. 14 (4)( a)(b)(c) ETC

<sup>7</sup> Art. 14 (4)( a)-(f) ETC

### **What is the optimum number of evaluations?**

Tips from the Interreg programmes: The optimum number of evaluations depends on the capacity and resources available: e.g.

- Budget: How much budget is available?
- Timing: Does the programme have the capacity to manage all evaluations at the same time?
- One contractor or several contractors: is one evaluator/team able to carry out all evaluations - in terms of knowledge and capacity?
- Internal resources: How many programme managers need to accompany the evaluation?

### **Are horizontal evaluations (e.g. on sustainable development) to be included in the general evaluation?**

Answer by DG Regio: According to the regulation every specific objective has to be evaluated - if such an evaluation covers the horizontal issues it is enough. A separate evaluation on horizontal issues is not obligatory.

### **How to evaluate similar interventions from the past period?**

Tips from the Interreg programmes: The results of the territorial cooperation actions are often seen only in a medium or long term context. By looking at what has been done in the relevant sector / field earlier (2007-2013), Interreg programmes may improve the insight into the added value of the cooperation interventions: start with the impact evaluation of actions from the former period and then extrapolate for the future. Look at professional studies and at previous work. Its advantageous in terms of timing as programmes have to wait often a long time in order to see those results.

### **How to assess the contribution of the programme to the EU 2020 Strategy?**

Answer by DG Regio: The evaluation of contribution to EU2020 does not have to be addressed through an own evaluation. It can be a qualitative assessment looking at the implementation (cause of what that impact can be).

### **Should the Interreg programmes evaluate how the Interreg programmes contribute to the GDP?**

Answer by DG Regio: The regulation indicates that 'when appropriate' the evaluation should show how the Interreg Programme is contributing to the GDP (Art. 54(1) CPR). However, this might be difficult for Interreg programmes to prove. That answer indicates that it is up to the programme to decide if it is appropriate in their programme to prove the contribution to the GDP.

**Due to the late start of most programmes, many of them might not have any projects, which are already finished. What to do if the programme does not have any results by 2017 when the Implementation Report 2017 is due? In 2017, programmes have to measure the results and report on them, but it may be that there is no evidence yet.**

Answer by DG Regio: The programmes have to justify why they don't have any results as of yet. It is possible that due to the late approval of the programmes, that not much will have changed by this date - nevertheless the programme needs to report on that. If the programme has spent already all the money then you will need to carry out an evaluation.

**How can the programmes assess the efficiency of the programme which is required in the regulation?<sup>8</sup> Is this possible by proofing the good functioning of the programme bodies?**

Answer by DG Regio: Yes, you can show efficiency by proofing the good functioning of programme bodies.

## 1.4. Data collection - evaluation

**How to ensure effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation:**

Feedback from programmes:

- Data collection for the purposes of monitoring programme's progress towards results (i.e. monitoring the dynamics of result indicators) is the responsibility of the programme bodies. If programme bodies do not take care of collecting this data and expect evaluators to do this, the evaluations will be very expensive. Proper data collection on programme level is a pre-condition for a good and cost-effective evaluation.
- Cross-border and transnational data remains a challenge for Interreg programmes, because it is difficult to collect the same quality of data from the whole programme area. A solution could be to finance data collection efforts through Interreg programmes, as strategic pre-defined projects.
- Try to use possible synergies - territorial, sectorial, macro-regional and sea basin strategy in data collection and evaluations.
- Some programmes use the TA of Goal 1 programmes to finance cross-programme or sector studies
- Including an evaluation work package in each project and building programme evaluations on the basis of aggregating project evaluations. Here it needs to be made sure that resources required for project management, controls and evaluations are proportionate vis-à-vis actual project activities.
- Use as much as possible existing credible data sources.
- Data obtained from projects via questionnaires - can be subjective, declarative. Processing and verifying such data presents a heavy workload for JS staff.
- It might be possible to use capitalisation and clustering initiatives to collect data.
- Some programmes have a data system to collect output indicators. Information will be entered directly by beneficiaries. (Quality checks of this data may be necessary).

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<sup>8</sup> Evaluations shall be carried out to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes, as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact. (Art. 54(1) CPR)

## 1.5. The evaluators

**Evaluation can be carried out by internal or external experts: What are the requirements on which experts should carry out an evaluation?**

Article 54(3) CPR indicates *“Evaluations shall be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation.”*

The European Commission recommends *to assign the evaluation to external experts or to an organisation different from that responsible for implementing the programme and any of the intermediate bodies reporting to it. With regard to the issue of functional independence, this arrangement does not raise any doubts. Such external expertise can bring knowledge and capacities to the programme authority that is not available within its administration itself.*

**How to guarantee the independence of the evaluator if the evaluation is done by the programme internally?**

The European Commission recommends **assigning the implementation of the programme and the evaluation** to different departments within the same organisation. *“Good practice would, in the view of the Commission services, require the following measures to be taken:*

- *Clear (written) job description for the person, team or sector assuming the evaluation function;*
- *Exclusion of the aforementioned person, team or sector from the authority of the services in charge of programme design/implementation.”<sup>9</sup>*

**What are some tips for programmes when they are working together with evaluators?**

The European Commission gives suggestions<sup>10</sup>:

- *It is generally better to develop recommendations in a dialogue between evaluator and the commissioner of evaluations because commissioners often have a clearer understanding what is feasible in a certain institutional or political context.*
- *The creation of knowledge - learning - is a cumulative process. It takes time, the effort of many evaluators, the exchange of findings and critical discussion. The Commission believes that there is a role to be played especially by central national administrations to organise this process.*

### **Summarising: General information on evaluation in 2014-2020**

- In 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy has a **stronger focus on results compared to the previous periods**: Programmes should follow a result-oriented approach based on the theory of change in their evaluations.
- **During the programming period** it is compulsory for programmes to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of their programme.
- Impact evaluations have to be carried out assessing **how the ERDF funding contributed to the objectives of each priority.**

<sup>9</sup> The Programming Period 2014-2020. Guidance document on Monitoring and Evaluation. Cohesion Fund and European Regional Development Fund, Concepts and Recommendations. March 2014, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.15

## 2. Evaluation plan

### 2.1. General questions related to an evaluation plan

#### How to prepare a good evaluation plan?

In the best case the programmes start drawing up their evaluation plans already together with the preparation of the operation programmes so that the ex ante evaluator can also assist in the drafting the evaluation plan.<sup>11</sup> However, it is recommended to start as early as possible.

The purpose of the evaluation plan is to improve the quality of evaluations and to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the programme. The evaluation plan is meant to describe the evaluation process and to support the programme in keeping its result orientation throughout the programme's life. It is a strategic document which gives a summary of the planned evaluations and its purposes. Therefore it is strongly recommended to **use the drafting period of the evaluation plan to reflect on the actual intentions of the programme, the actual change that the programme would like to make and what evidence is needed to show if this change has taken place:**

*The evaluation plan should explain how the evaluation process will provide evidence to allow for overall conclusions on the contribution of each programme priority axis to their objectives. The evaluations planned should also allow the managing authorities to conclude on the impact of the programme in relation to the targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.*<sup>12</sup>

#### When shall the evaluation plan be submitted to the Monitoring Committee?

*The evaluation plan shall be submitted to the monitoring committee no later than one year after the adoption of the operational programme.* (Art. 114(1) CPR)

#### How detailed should the evaluation plan be?

The evaluation plan should refer to the main points which are suggested in the guidance document on the evaluation plan<sup>13</sup> (see chapter 2.2. element of an evaluation plan).

**Tips from the Interreg programmes:** When drafting the evaluation plan the programme should consider the resources available and plan proportionate to programme's scope and size: what budget is available, how many programme staff are involved in evaluation etc.

#### Does the evaluation plan need to be published?

*The European Commission recommends that the evaluation plans are **made public** for example by posting them on the website of the managing authority.*<sup>14</sup>

**Answer from DG Regio:** Publishing the whole evaluation plan on the programme website is **not obligatory**. The Interreg programmes can decide only to **publish parts of the**

<sup>11</sup> Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation. March 2014, p.15

<sup>12</sup> The programming Period 2014-2020. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. European Regional Development, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund. Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. Terms of References for Impact Evaluations. Guidance on Quality Management of External Evaluations. February 2015; p. 8

<sup>13</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 10

evaluation plan, and for example not to publish the budget for evaluation (remove commercially sensitive information).

### Is the European Commission approving the evaluation plans?

*Answer from DG Regio:* No, the European Commission is not approving the evaluation plan. The evaluation plan is only approved by the Monitoring Committee. However representatives of the European Commission are participating in the Monitoring Committee meetings and are in this way involved in the approving process.

After the evaluation plan was approved the programmes should upload it to SFC. The European Commission can then further analyse the evaluation plans and suggest best practices. However, the EC will not provide any official feedback to each evaluation plan.

### What happens if the evaluation plan changes?

*The European Commission recommends that the monitoring committee reviews the implementation of the evaluation plan at least once a year; it must approve any amendments which are deemed necessary. Monitoring committees can also set up specific working groups to involve relevant partners in evaluation.*<sup>15</sup>

The DG Regio Evaluation Unit has introduced a helpdesk on evaluation plans in order to support the programmes when drafting these plans. Are Interreg programmes required to send their evaluation plan to this helpdesk? And what is the advantage for the programmes?

*Answer from DG Regio:* It is not a requirement to send the drafts of evaluation plans to the helpdesk. However, the Evaluation Unit will try to look at all these drafts and send recommendations to the evaluation plan.

### **Summarising: What are the most important general issues referring to the evaluation plan?**

- The evaluation plan shall be submitted to the monitoring committee no later than one year after the adoption of the operational programme.
- The DG Regio Evaluation Unit introduced a helpdesk, where programmes are invited to send their drafts (before the evaluation plan is approved by the monitoring committee) in order to get some feedback on the quality of the evaluation plan.
- The evaluation plan is not approved by the European Commission, but by the Monitoring Committee.
- Publishing the whole evaluation plan on the programme website is not obligatory. Interreg programmes can decide only to publish parts of it, and for example remove commercially sensitive information such as the budget.
- **After the evaluation plan was approved the programmes should upload it to SFC.**

<sup>15</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 10

## 2.2. Elements of an evaluation plan

The Guidance Document<sup>16</sup> on Evaluation Plans suggests that the evaluation plan should contain three main parts: 1. Objectives, Coverage, Coordination, 2. Evaluation Framework, 3. Planned Evaluation.

## 2.3. First part of the evaluation plan (objectives, coverage and coordination)

### What information should the first part of the evaluation plan include?

In the first part of the evaluation plan there should be an introduction setting out its main objectives, some details about the coverage of the evaluation plan, an analysis of relevant evidence available and some information on the mechanisms of coordination and exchange between Managing Authorities on evaluations planned, evaluation findings and methodologies<sup>17</sup>.

### What could the main objectives of the evaluation plan for an Interreg programme look like?

The objectives of the evaluation plan for the Interreg programmes for the period 2014-2020 are to:

- 1) Improve the quality of evaluations through proper planning, including through identification and collection of necessary data (Art. 52(2) CPR );
- 2) Provide a framework to plan impact evaluations (Art. 56(3) CPR);
- 3) Ensure that resources for funding and managing the evaluations are appropriate (Art. 54(2) CPR) and proportionate in terms of budget or resources
- 4) Enable informed programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings;
- 5) Ensure that evaluations provide inputs for annual implementation and progress reports;
- 6) Facilitate the synthesis of findings from different Member States by the European Commission and the exchange of available evidence;

### Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- It is important to ensure a realistic measurement of programme's impact.
- The aim of better preparation of the programme for the next period should be underlined. Many of the programmes used previous periods' evaluations for the 2014-2020 programming. Some specific issues resulting from concrete experience could also be added. For example, management issues discovered in the previous period.
- Programmes should focus on strict and clear objectives, avoiding an 'over-evaluation'.

<sup>16</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5

<sup>17</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5+6

### Is it possible to prepare one evaluation plan for more than one programme?

*The evaluation plan may include evaluations of interventions from other programming periods when deemed useful for improving the 2014-2020 programming. (Art. 114(1) CPR)<sup>18</sup>*

*The evaluation plan shall be drawn up by the managing authority of Member States for one or more operational programmes” (Art. 114, CPR; Art. 56(1) CPR).*

Answer from DG Regio: If the Managing Authority is the same for more programmes, it makes sense to draft only one evaluation plan. However, if the Managing Authority has only one evaluation plan for more programmes it need to change the evaluation plan more often - each time one programme makes a change.

### What mechanisms of coordination between Managing authorities on evaluation issues should be set up?

*It would also be good practice to set up mechanisms within a Member State for coordination and exchange between Managing Authorities on evaluations planned, evaluation findings and methodologies. This would allow for a better coordination of evaluations carried out in certain policy fields and favour exchange of knowledge and practices between managing authorities. A specific area of coordination is the integrated approach according to Art. 15(2) CPR.<sup>19</sup>*

#### Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Interreg programmes should be pro-active in coordinating and exchanging with other Managing Authorities on evaluations planned; for example, if some other Managing Authority plans to carry out an impact evaluation in some field relevant for both Interreg programmes, a joint evaluation - or at least a joint data collection - could be considered.
- Member States should play a fundamental role in promoting exchanges among programmes. Programmes suggested also that Interreg programmes’ impact should be foreseen in the evaluation of IGJ Programmes.
- For a better use of ressources, joint evaluations for macro-regional strategies or sea basin strategies areas should be considered. They should be included already in the evaluation plans of the involved programmes (all kind: Interreg, EC managed ones, etc.).

### What can be understood by the ‘analysis of relevant evidence available’?

*An analysis of relevant evidence available helps to decide where the evaluation efforts should be most concentrated. This evidence could be found in evaluations carried out during the preceding periods, EU ex post evaluations, evaluation literature and preparatory studies for this programming period. When operational programmes are designed at a regional level, the European Commission suggests that this collection of evidence is coordinated at a national level as many interventions are similar in different programmes.<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5

<sup>19</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5

<sup>20</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- The analysis of relevant evidence available will mainly be done as desk research by most of the Interreg programmes. However, it is a good idea to ask the ex-ante evaluators for such a check (for example the Two Sea programme). When making the above analysis it is important to identify the studies, evaluations, etc. , that are truly relevant and appropriate for Interreg programmes (e.g. the methodology they use, the scope, and the geography of such a study).
- One possibility could be to use (area-wide) designed projects to get specific data.

## 2.4. Second part of the evaluation plan (evaluation framework)

### What information should be included in the second part of the evaluation plan?

The Guidance document on the evaluation plan<sup>21</sup> lists the following points to be included in the second part of the evaluation plan:

- *The **evaluation function** with a clearly defined responsibility for designing and delivering the evaluation plan, and coordinating, monitoring and promoting the quality of evaluation activities throughout the whole evaluation cycle.*
- ***Description of the evaluation process** led by the Managing Authority (responsibilities of involved bodies: evaluation steering group, technical working groups, scientific or other expert academic input, monitoring committee etc.).*
- *The **involvement of partners in evaluation** (Art. 5(2) and (3)(d) and Art. 49(4) CPR) within the framework of the monitoring committees or in specific working groups established by the monitoring committees; and their consultation on the report(s) summarising the findings of evaluations due by 31 December 2022.*
- *The **source for evaluation expertise (internal/ external/ mixed)** and provisions ensuring the functional independence of evaluators from the authorities responsible for programme implementation (Art. 54(3) CPR)*
- *Possibly a **training programme** (for example, seminars, workshops, self-study and working with other evaluators) for people from the Managing Authority dealing with the evaluation.*
- *A **strategy to ensure use and communication** of evaluations: how their findings will be followed up; how the evaluations will be made public (Article 54(4) CPR); how they will be transmitted to the European Commission.*
- *An **overall timetable** showing how the evaluations will feed into the implementation and the various reports by the programme;*
- *The **overall budget** for implementation of the evaluation plan (covering the cost of evaluations, data collection, training etc.). Including a budget, human resources and possibly a training programme contributes to meeting the legal obligation of Member States to provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations (Article 54(2) CPR). If technical assistance is used for the purpose of the plan, the corresponding amount should be set aside in the TA budget.*
- *A **quality management strategy**<sup>22</sup> for the evaluation process: drafting good terms of reference and managing contracts have an important role to play in delivering good evaluation results.*

<sup>21</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 5+6

<sup>22</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; Annex 1 and 2, p. 11ff

## 2.4.1. Responsibilities resulting from the evaluation plan: evaluation function, description of the evaluation process, involvement of partners in the evaluation

### What are the responsibilities of Member States and the Managing Authority in drafting the Evaluation Plan?

*An evaluation plan shall be drawn up by the managing authority or Member State and may cover more than one programme. It shall be submitted in accordance with the Fund-specific rules. (Art. 56(1) CPR)*

### What are the responsibilities of the Monitoring Committee referring to the Evaluation Plan?

In the CPR regulation the responsibilities are defined as follows:

*The monitoring committee shall examine and approve the evaluation plan for the operational programme and any amendment of the evaluation plan, including where either is part of a common evaluation plan pursuant to Article 114(1); (Art. 110(2)(c) CPR)*

*The monitoring committee shall examine in particular the progress made in implementation of the evaluation plan and the follow-up given to findings of evaluations (Art. 110(1)(b) CPR)*

In the guidance documents on evaluation plans<sup>23</sup> the responsibilities are defined as follows:

*The Commission recommends that the monitoring committee reviews the implementation of the evaluation plan at least once a year; it must approve any amendments which are deemed necessary. Monitoring committees can also set up specific working groups to involve relevant partners in evaluation.*

*The choice of the interventions, the impact of which will be evaluated more in depth is a strategic one: approving and reviewing the evaluation plan should be preceded by a debate in the monitoring committee on the expected main results of the programme, their policy importance, their timing and the availability of evidence in the field.*

*The monitoring committee will also examine the progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan and the follow up given to the findings of evaluations (Article 110(1)(b)). This shall be reported within each annual implementation report (Article 111(4)(a) CPR).*

### How to involve programme partners in the evaluation process?

#### Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Create a working group, e.g. an evaluation steering group, in order to ensure that the interests of all major stakeholders/partners are taken into consideration
- Involve relevant sectors, e.g. different ministries which might have interest in cooperation programmes
- It is important to clearly define responsibilities of those involved in the evaluation process
- When discussing the involvement of partners, the problem to understand the difference between monitoring and evaluation, and who is the stakeholder of these activities

<sup>23</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 10

**What source of evaluation expertise (internal/ external/ mixed) could/should Interreg programmes use?**

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Often selection of evaluators is based on the principle of the cheapest offer. It is strongly recommended that in the selection of evaluation experts, their previous experience with similar assignments, territorial cooperation expertise and the quality of the proposed expert pool are given a more substantial weight than the price.
- Internal evaluation units (where they exist) prepare the ToRs and the evaluation is then done by external experts. However, it is crucial that the internal evaluation unit always coordinates work of external experts and closely follows what they do.

**What is meant by training activities related to the evaluation process?**

Answer by DG Regio: A training plan should cover the knowledge gap for people from the programme dealing with the evaluation: it should not be just a general training on evaluations but needs to be more concrete, based on the knowledge gap of the group to be trained.

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Define gaps in needed knowledge - for example not training for evaluation in general, but on certain methods, e.g. counterfactual method
- Trainings for MC members to understand the new focus of evaluation (by Interact)
- Define the benefit of individual trainings as opposed to group trainings. In some cases training individuals on certain aspects of evaluation (methods) could bring more benefit for the whole organisation, provided that they disseminate their new knowledge. Where this might be too costly, group trainings are an option.

**2.4.2. A strategy to ensure the use and communication of evaluation results**

The evaluation plan should contain some details on the use that will be made of the findings of the evaluation and by whom. In addition the guidelines for disseminating the results should be outlined (e.g. the reports will be made available to the public through the website).

**All evaluation reports should be transmitted to the European Commission through SFC. How to ensure use and communication of evaluation results?**

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Target groups should be clear: general public, programme bodies, project beneficiaries? Based on target groups the messages will be determined.
- Sharing results of evaluation with project beneficiaries should become standard because this can lead to better motivation of their work if they see that their projects are contributing to overall success and good performance of programmes.
- The communication of the evaluation results depends on which data is available. In addition the timing is an issue. That is why a meeting about outcomes of (old) evaluations and how they were communicated would be useful - to make the link between evaluations, capitalisation and communication.

### 2.4.3. Timetable and budget

The timetable should show how the evaluations feed into the reporting. The overall budget should be stated.

**Which evaluations should/could be relevant for the Interreg programmes:**

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Impact evaluations (legally required)
- Evaluations looking at the effectiveness, efficiency (legally required)
- Evaluation of the communication strategy (legally required)
- Evaluation of the contribution to macro-regional strategies
- Evaluation of the contribution to EU 2020
- Evaluation/monitoring of the result indicators value

More information about which evaluations are legally required and what evaluations are optional can be found in Chapter ‘1.3. Evaluations: why, what and how?’

### 2.4.4. Quality Management strategy for the evaluation process

The Quality Management strategy should describe how quality checks within the evaluation process will be implemented.

**Which issues should be covered by the quality management strategy?**

Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Drafting detailed Terms of References
- Selection of the tenderer: setting out clear award criteria and quality requirements, wide advertising of tender; clear description of the quality of the work provided
- Engagement of stakeholders in the evaluation process, e.g., form an evaluation steering committee, involve experts
- Discussion of findings with evaluator: throughout the evaluation process, close contact between the programme and the evaluator, e.g., in the beginning organize a kick-off meeting with evaluator to discuss Terms of References and task, etc.
- Steering the whole evaluation process
- Following ethical, methodological standards
- Reporting: request an inception report and process reports
- Ensure the quality of the data

More information on quality management can be found in Guidance on Evaluation Plan, Annex 2<sup>24</sup> and in Chapter ‘3.8. Quality of impact evaluations’.

<sup>24</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 20

## 2.5. Third part of the evaluation plan (planned evaluations)

What information should be included in the third part of the evaluation plan?

The Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans<sup>25</sup> states as follows:

- **Theme, scope, subject and rationale**, including the background, the coverage, the main approach (process or impact evaluation) and the main guiding evaluation questions. Evaluations beyond a 3 year period are indicative, the nearer the time of launching the evaluations, the more detailed evaluation questions can be developed. These questions can be adapted and further specified in the ToR of the evaluations.
- **Methods to be used and their data requirements**: according to the evaluation subject, different methods may apply: a process evaluation may use data analysis, interviews, and surveys while an evaluation on the effects of the programme may involve other methods such as a literature review, focus groups, case studies or setting up comparison groups. Making commitments that particular data sets required for certain evaluations will be available or will be collected and the timeframe are recommended.
- **Duration and a tentative date**: These are linked with the evaluation subject and coverage and the methods selected, e.g., an impact evaluation can only be carried out once results are achieved, while some methods where the necessary data have to be collected are more time consuming than others.
- - **Estimated budget for each evaluation**: the cost is linked to the selected methods and the duration of the contract.

Interreg programmes have to list in their evaluation plan which evaluations they will implement in this programming period, including the impact evaluation(s). When drafting the evaluation plan the programme needs to have some concrete ideas which method it will use, which data need to be collected and which questions will be looked at in the evaluation(s). This overview should include **theme, scope, subject and rationale**, including, the main **approach** (process or impact evaluation) and the main guiding **evaluation questions**. *“The evaluation plan should explain how the evaluation process will provide evidence to allow for overall conclusions on the contribution of each programme priority axis to their objectives. The evaluations planned should also allow the Managing Authority to conclude on the impact of the programme in relation to the targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The evaluation plan is thus a strategic document which will accompany the programme throughout its life and support its result orientation”*<sup>26</sup>.

More information related to third part of the evaluation plan can be found in Chapter 1 ‘Evaluation: why, what and how?’ and Chapter 3: Impact evaluation.

<sup>25</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 7

<sup>26</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 8

### 3. Impact evaluations<sup>27</sup>

In this chapter the focus will be on impact evaluations, providing some information on how to prepare impact evaluations, and giving some tips on an approach for defining questions for the impact evaluations. In addition, the specific data requirements and methods for impact evaluations are discussed in this chapter.

#### 3.1. Legal requirements on the impact evaluations

##### What are the legal requirements of impact evaluations?

In impact evaluations the programme should **assess the projects' contribution to the objectives of the programme priority**: *“During the programming period, the **managing authority shall ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact, are carried out for each programme on the basis of the evaluation plan and that each evaluation is subject to appropriate follow-up in accordance with the Fund-specific rules. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority. All evaluations shall be examined by the monitoring committee and sent to the Commission.**”* (Art. 56(3) CPR)

*“Evaluations shall be carried out to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes, as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The impact of programmes shall be evaluated, in the light of the mission of each ESI Fund, in relation to the targets under the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and, having regard to the size of the programme, in relation to GDP and unemployment in the programme area concerned, where appropriate.”* (Art. 54(1) CPR)

#### 3.2. General comments on the aspects of impact evaluations

##### What is the purpose of the impact evaluations?

The aim of impact evaluations is to assess how the ERDF funding contributed to the objectives of each programme priority (Art. 56(3) CPR). The Interreg programmes have to assess for each of their priorities if the objectives of the priority were achieved through the projects and what other factors contributed to the achievement.

##### Should the impact evaluations also assess the programme's contribution to the 2020 objectives?

The regulation also indicates that the impact evaluations should show how the Interreg programmes contribute to the EU2020 objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (see Art. 54(1) CPR). The Evaluation plan should specify how deeply the programme's contribution to the observed results will be evaluated, including the contribution to the EU2020 objectives. This will depend on the nature of the results, the available knowledge in the field of intervention and the importance of understanding the

<sup>27</sup> Since the Regulation (Art. 54(1) CPR) requires to assess the contribution to the objectives for each priority, several impact evaluations need to be carried out. That is why we talk about impact evaluations in the whole document.

impact of some interventions for policy making”<sup>28</sup>. If evaluations were already carried out on the same kind of intervention and/or the impact is likely to be achieved in the longer term, a meta-analysis of the findings of such studies or evaluations would suffice.

Answer by DG Regio: It is most likely rather difficult for Interreg programmes to show how the programme is contributing to the EU2020 targets.

**Does the programme need to send the impact evaluations to the European Commission?**  
Impact evaluations have to be discussed with the monitoring committee and have to be sent to the European Commission. (Art. 56(3) CPR).

**If the programme has a result indicator for the Technical Assistance (TA), does it need to carry out an impact evaluation on the use of TA?**

Answer by DG Regio: There is no need to carry out an impact evaluation for TA, even if the programme has a respective result indicator.

**Does the performance framework have any effect on the impact evaluations?**

Answer by DG Regio: The performance framework is only concerned with outputs and is not relevant for impact evaluations.

**Summarising: What impact evaluations are expected from Interreg programmes?**

- Impact evaluations assess how the ERDF funding contributed to the objectives of each priority of the programme.
- The impact evaluations should outline what change the programme achieved through its interventions. Therefore the programme should start with reflecting on the intervention logic.
- As the evaluation approach might differ per priority, there will be one or more impact evaluations per Interreg programme
- The impact evaluations should show how the ERDF contributed to the objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and where possible how the programme contributed to the GDP growth and employment.

### 3.3. Timing of impact evaluations

**What is the best timing for an impact evaluation?**

The timing of impact evaluations has to be balanced. In general, it should be scheduled as late as possible to enable the **availability of results** but also as early as possible to **allow the findings to feed into the policy process**. The timing has to be realistic and should depend on the nature of the programme. As the guidance document on Evaluation Plans states *“a compromise has to be reached between what is reasonable for a follow-up*

<sup>28</sup>Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 8

*interval from the perspective of the intervention and the need of Managing Authorities for timely evidence on impacts*<sup>29</sup>.

To support the ex-post evaluation performed by the European Commission, the impact evaluations are required to be conducted before the end of 2022 so that they feed into the programme report on evaluation results due by 31 December 2022.

**Can the programme carry out impact evaluations at the beginning (when only little expenditure was spent)?**

*Answer by DG Regio:* This is possible but the programme might consider then to do impact evaluations also at the end of the period in order to have clear information about its impact.

**Does the programme carry out all impact evaluations at the same time? Does the programme look at all its specific objectives at the same time?**

It is possible to carry out all impact evaluations at the same time. However, it is important to consider the following issues:

- The programme can decide to work with one or more evaluators. As there has to be an impact evaluation for each specific objective, different evaluators may need to be contracted for each impact evaluation, because the evaluator does not have the thematic knowledge of each specific objective.
- Does the programme have the resources (staff, budget) for the procurement of more evaluations at the same time?
- It could be that data of the different specific objectives are available at different times, for example, innovation is available earlier or that projects for a certain priority have been finalised earlier.

### 3.4. Preparing impact evaluations

**When to start preparing the impact evaluations?**

Each programme should start discussing the impact evaluations with the drafting of an evaluation plan.

**What should be included on impact evaluations in the evaluation plan?**

Interreg programmes should include in the evaluation plan as a minimum the following information about the planned impact evaluation(s):

- *“Subject and rationale, including the background, the coverage, the main approach (process or impact evaluation) and the main guiding evaluation questions. These can be adapted and further specified in the ToR of the evaluations.”*<sup>30</sup>

When the evaluation plan is being developed the Interreg programme should discuss: What will be the objective of the impact evaluation(s) and how deeply

<sup>29</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 8

<sup>30</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015; p. 7

will the impact be evaluated? Defining the draft evaluation questions will help, as this gives focus to the impact evaluation.

- **Methods to be used and their data requirements:** *“according to the evaluation subject, different methods may apply: ... an evaluation on the effects of the programme may involve other methods such as a literature review, focus groups, case studies or setting up comparison groups.”*<sup>31</sup>  
When the evaluation plan is being developed the Interreg programme should discuss: Which methods should be used considering the objective of the evaluation and data availability? For example, theory based or counterfactual impact evaluation, e.g. using survey, interviews, quantitative or qualitative data collection, etc.
- **“Commitments that particular data sets required for certain evaluations will be available or will be collected and the timeframe;** *experience shows that the lack of systematic collection of evaluation data from the very beginning significantly increases the cost of collecting them retrospectively (the evaluator has to reconstruct ex post a set of data) or leads to using less rigorous methods (where collecting this data afterwards is not feasible).”*<sup>32</sup>  
When the evaluation plan is being developed the Interreg programme should discuss: Which data needs to be available to conduct the impact evaluation according to its aims? Is this data available (already collected) or if not, how can this data be collected?
- **Duration and a tentative date.** *The duration and date of the impact evaluation “are linked with the evaluation subject and coverage and the methods selected, e.g. an impact evaluation(s) can only be carried out once results are achieved, while some methods, where the necessary data have to be collected, are more time consuming than others.”*<sup>33</sup>  
When the evaluation plan is being developed the Interreg programme should discuss: When should the impact evaluation(s) take place? *“As a general rule, impact evaluation(s) should be scheduled as late as necessary to give time for the expected results to appear and as early as possible to allow their findings to feed into the policy process.”*<sup>34</sup>
- **Estimated budget for each evaluation:** *the cost is linked to the selected methods and the duration of the contract for the evaluator.*<sup>35</sup>  
When the evaluation plan is being developed the Interreg programme should discuss: Which budget is realistically needed for the impact evaluation? Discussing the objective, approach, methods and duration of the evaluation will enable an estimation of the needed budget. It is important that the required activities are feasible within the given budget. If the budget is not feasible (e.g. too high), the programme should revise the approach of the evaluation.

<sup>31</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p.7

<sup>32</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p.7

<sup>33</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p.7

<sup>34</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p. 8

<sup>35</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p.7

### **Summarising: What details on impact evaluation do the Interreg programmes need to summarise in the evaluation plan?**

Interreg Programmes need to include the following details about the impact evaluations in the evaluation plan:

- What will be the objective of the impact evaluation(s) and how deeply will the impact be evaluated?
- Which evaluation questions should the impact evaluations answer?
- Which method(s) is/are the most suitable, considering the objective of the evaluation and data availability?
- **Which data needs to be available to conduct the impact evaluation according to its aims? Is this data available (already collected) or if not, how to collect this data?**
- When should the impact evaluations take place?
- Which budget and resources are realistically needed for the impact evaluations? Are they available?

### **How to start preparing for the impact evaluations of the programme?**

Interreg programmes should start preparing for the impact evaluation by reflecting on its intervention logic, the needs of the programme, the defined specific objectives and the indicators. What is the objective of each priority? What is the most important that should be achieved by the programme? Is there potentially a gap, things not covered by the programme? Will the actual foreseen change be feasible with the current objectives? Once the programme has a good overview of the meaning, logic, objectives and assumptions and foreseen changes of each of the priorities, it can start discussing the aim of the impact evaluations.

### **What should be included in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the impact evaluations?**

There are no specific requirements regarding the ToR in the CPR and ETC regulations. The European Commission has provided detailed guidance on drafting ToR for impact evaluations.<sup>36</sup>

#### Tips from the Interreg programmes:

Good quality evaluations need to be honest in their judgment. To assure it, relevant provisions in the contract for the evaluators need to be included, e.g. regular meetings, progress reports so it would be possible to have a constant influence on the outcome of the evaluation report. In addition, the tender procedures for offers of evaluation should be as geographically wide as possible. Thus, it is recommended to publish the calls for offers also on the Interact website.

### **Which deliverables are expected from impact evaluations?**

There are a number of deliverables that can be expected from an impact evaluation. It is not an obligation to produce all of them. Depending on the size of the evaluation budget, only a few of them need to be considered. The following deliverables are suggested in the guidance document on evaluation plan<sup>37</sup>:

<sup>36</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, Annex 1, p. 11-19.

<sup>37</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p. 16-17.

- Inception Report: This document details the methodology that the evaluator will use to conduct the impact evaluations (e.g. the tasks in the ToR). Usually, it is delivered about one month after the kick-off meeting and it is a crucial step in ensuring an evaluation of quality is delivered.
- A draft evaluation report, to be discussed among the relevant stakeholders in order to provide comments.
- Final Report: A draft final report is to be prepared close to the end of the contract with the evaluator. It will contain the results, conclusions and sometimes recommendations on all evaluation questions of the ToR. The final impact evaluations report, as a minimum, should set out the purpose, context, objectives, questions, information sources, methods used, evidence, findings and recommendations in a complete and balanced way.

*For more complex evaluations, it is advisable to ask for one or more interim reports as well as monthly progress reports. Generally, it is also recommendable to foresee a system of economic incentives/disincentives to assure the quality of the deliverables and their on time delivery (i.e., linking payments to acceptance of deliverables).<sup>38</sup>*

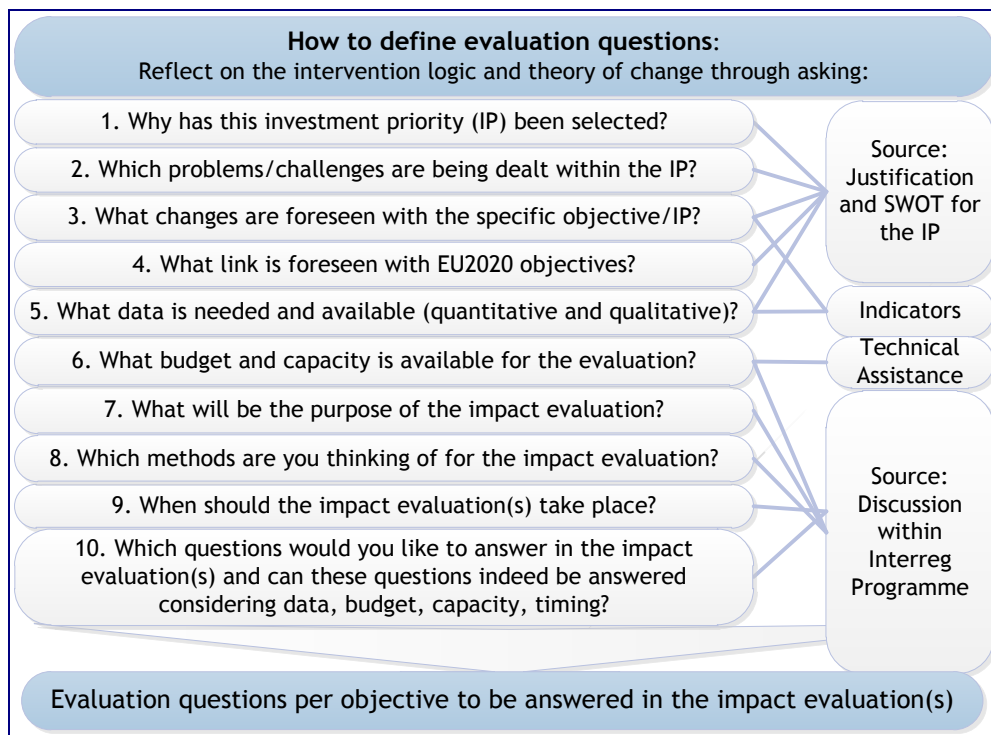
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<sup>38</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p. 16-17

### 3.5. Formulating good impact evaluations questions

#### How to define impact evaluation questions?

Interreg programmes should start the preparation and planning of the impact evaluations as soon as the programme has been approved as the outline of the impact evaluations has to be included in the evaluation plan. The first step for defining the questions of the impact evaluations is to start with reflecting on the intervention logic. The following questions can be asked:



Source: Ecorys on basis of EU regulation and Guidance document from the Commission

Formulating good evaluation questions is an essential step in the impact evaluations: the more specific the questions are, the more useful the answers will be. Evaluation questions will have to be defined to identify how the ERDF contributed to the objectives of each priority.

#### Does each specific objective need to be evaluated in an impact evaluation?

Each specific objective should be covered by the impact evaluation but not each project needs to be evaluated and not the same evaluation approach needs to be applied for all results across the programme priorities. It is recommended that the Interreg programme starts the reflection per specific objective. Once the questions have been answered for each specific objective the programme can decide to organise one or more impact evaluations.

**Summarising: What to consider when defining impact evaluation questions:**

- Well-defined evaluation questions are the fundamental part of good impact evaluations. Each Interreg programme is strongly recommended to think carefully together with relevant stakeholders about what they would like to evaluate.
- Interreg programmes should cover each specific objective of their intervention logic but it can vary in the extent of coverage. The evaluation questions should be related to the change which can be observed in the specific objective. However the specific objectives can be assessed to different degrees.
- To define the most relevant evaluation questions Interreg programmes should start with the reflection of the intervention logic: what does the programme want to change?
- The issues of greatest concern should be addressed by the specific evaluation questions.
- For each evaluation question different evaluation methods can be used.
- The Interreg programmes as the commissioner of the evaluation should have an idea of the data and methods which could be needed to answer the evaluation questions.
- Interreg programmes are strongly advised not only to present the evaluation questions to the Monitoring Committee but also to discuss the evaluation questions with the Monitoring Committee to ensure that there is an interest in the results of the evaluation.

### 3.6. Methods for impact evaluations

#### Is there an ideal evaluation method guaranteeing valid answers?

*“Choice and combination of methods need to be decided on a case-by-case base. A range of methods is available and there is no “best” method for all circumstances.”<sup>39</sup>*

The suitable evaluation method will depend on the investment priority, specific objective and the evaluation questions that need to be answered. Very often a mix of evaluation techniques might be necessary to understand what happened and why. For each specific objective a different evaluation method could be used.

#### What is the difference between theory based and counterfactual impact evaluation?

There are two conceptually distinct types of evaluation possible: **theory based impact evaluations** and **counterfactual impact evaluations**:

**Theory based impact evaluations** are based on establishing the theory behind an intervention (the theory of change) and assessing whether it has been implemented according to that theory in order to judge the contribution of the intervention to the observed effects. The theory based impact evaluations deals with ‘*why it works*’, ‘*did things work as expected to produce the desired change*’.

*“Methods primarily devoted to understanding **why** an intervention produces intended and unintended effects, **for whom and in which context**. The goal is to answer the “**why it works?**” question by identifying the theory of change behind the programme and assessing its success by comparing theory with actual implementation.”<sup>40</sup>*

Evaluators have to describe these theories - if they have not been concisely articulated - and explain them in a testable way. Then they have to test the theory of change.

To be able to undertake a theory based impact evaluation in general the following steps (these can differ according to the specific approach taken):

- a. What theory of change is underlying the priority/programme? What are the problems/development opportunities behind the objectives?
- b. Which changes were foreseen (direct, indirect, other impacts)?
- c. Identify and quantify the actual occurred impacts (direct, indirect, other impacts)?
- d. Draft a narrative on the expected and achieved changes and if the programme worked as expected to produce the desired change?

**Counterfactual impact evaluations** focus on the set of questions which are devoted to quantifying “*whether a given intervention produces the desired effects on some pre-established dimension of interest. The overarching goal is to answer a “**does it make a difference**” question by identifying and estimating causal effects through counterfactual methods.*”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Guidance document on Monitoring and Evaluation. March 2014, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Evalsed Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Evalsed Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques, p. 47.

The core element of a counterfactual impact evaluation is to compare two groups/areas to see what has been the change in the group/area with the intervention and in the group/area without the intervention.

*“The challenge for quantifying effects is finding a credible approximation to what would have occurred in the absence of the intervention and to compare it with what actually happened.”<sup>42</sup>*

There are the following ways to assess the counterfactual:

- Using the outcome observed for non-beneficiaries.
- Using the outcome observed for beneficiaries before they are exposed to the intervention.

The evaluator faces the challenge *“to avoid giving a casual interpretation to differences that are due to other factors, not the intervention. It is necessary to identify the possible sources of bias arising in each specific situation and indicate which methods can overcome these biases, under which assumption. This is the essence of the counterfactual impact evaluation.”<sup>43</sup>*

Impact evaluations of **both types** will first of all explore if and how the public intervention under scrutiny made a difference for the beneficiaries. However, a good evaluation should also relate its findings (e.g. the impact on beneficiaries) to the policy monitoring that looks at the entirety of potential beneficiaries. That is why it was a perceived need of a region, a sector or a group of people that triggered the intervention in the first place. So after an appropriate duration, authorities should ask if the problem identified in the beginning has been fixed. Was the effect of the intervention big enough to matter? In other words, was the intervention useful?

It is to be expected that most Interreg programmes will be using the theory based impact evaluation, considering the available budget, data and capacity.

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<sup>42</sup> Evalsed Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques, p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Evalsed Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques, p. 77-118.

### 3.7. Evaluation data requirements

**Which data do the programmes need to collect? What kind of data will likely be needed to conduct a good impact evaluation?**

A good evaluation relies on good quality data. **The evaluation questions will determine which data needs to be collected, and when.** This may be monitoring data or new data which needs to be collected specifically for the evaluation through surveys and interviews with stakeholders.

The specific data required for an evaluation will have to be identified in the first step of planning an evaluation: it could be that the programme needs to start collecting data before the programme activities will actually be implemented, to ensure that the situation before the intervention can be captured (define the “baseline”).

**Which methods and techniques are to be used to collect data?**

There are several methods and techniques to collect data and evaluate impact, as shown in the figure below, together with the advantages (pros) and disadvantages (cons).

Data collection tools	Pros	Cons
Stakeholder analysis	Involvement	Subjective
Case studies	Practice	Representativeness
Surveys	Representative	Budget
Expert panels	Subjective	Representativeness
Focus groups	Target groups	Budget
Interviews	Broad participation	Subjective
Monitoring Systems (indicators)	Quantitative	Correctly filled?
SWOT	Simple	Qualitative
Experimental and statistical methods (see annex)	Scientific	Expensive

Source: Based on the research of Ecorys

In the Terms of Reference there should be an indication of which information/data is available and being monitored and what the programme would like to achieve. The exact evaluation method or technique can be chosen by the contractor.

Please note: when interventions are not clearly defined in Interreg programmes (character, target group, size, budget etc.) than a quantitative impact evaluation will be difficult. Hence the quality of the programme and its interventions (and its clarity and detail in writing in the programme) will determine to a large extent the possibilities for any impact evaluation.

Although most of these methods and techniques are qualitative, they can be used quantitatively when there is a clear categorisation and sufficient number of answers. For example: “50% of all respondents consider that the foreseen change has taken place and was caused by the programme”

**Examples of data to be collected are:**

**Quantitative:** e.g. the indicators as defined by the programme.

**Qualitative:** e.g. data that helps identifying if the objectives of the priorities have been achieved and to which extent the Interreg projects contributed to achieving these priorities. This could be data collected from/through:

Stakeholder consultation: in Interreg programmes a broad variety of stakeholders is involved from several countries, e.g., social and economic partners, regions, municipalities. A stakeholder consultation can be done either through phone or face-to-face interviews, sending an email, a web based questionnaire or by organising a roundtable meeting, e.g., linked to a monitoring committee meeting. A stakeholder consultation can be useful to get qualitative information on e.g., the effect of projects on policy, the effect of the projects on the results. Please note that one has to pay attention that a representative group is involved.

Case studies: If there is not a lot of data available and if the budget is limited, case studies are a useful method for Interreg programmes.

Surveys: Surveys can be used by Interreg programmes to reach a larger group. A survey will be mostly a web-based questionnaire but can also be a poll on the street or (phone) interviews.

Expert panels: Expert panels can be used to consult stakeholder on a one-time or more regular basis.

Focus groups: Focus groups can be useful to get feedback from target groups of the programme. However, they are also time intensive (to identify, organise, report, follow up) and thus expensive.

Interviews: Phone or face-to-face interviews are very often used to collect qualitative data and opinions. It is however a time intensive approach.

Monitoring systems (indicators): For Interreg programmes the monitoring systems are an important element in collecting data. Therefore it's important that Interreg programmes reflect carefully on which data is needed for the impact evaluation(s) to see if they can include it in their own monitoring system, e.g., through activity reports from the projects, asking them to quantify certain results and to which extent this result has been achieved through the project or other external effects.

**Summarising Evaluation data requirements**

The evaluation questions will determine which data needs to be collected, and when. This may be monitoring data or new data which needs to be collected specifically for the evaluation through surveys and interviews with stakeholders.

Indicate clearly in the Terms of Reference which data is available and which data is not available. This will enable the external expert to select the techniques that will match best to achieve the results.

## How to best collect data across the border?

There are several ways to collect data:

- **Existing data on European, national, and regional level:** this is best to be collected through the regions, in case Eurostat or national statistics will not have the needed data available.
- **Data from projects reports:** Projects are asked to provide, for example, data on how they contribute to the objectives of the programme priority. This is a useful and relatively simple way to collect data across the border.
- **Additional information:** e.g, surveys (online, personal interviews), policy documents, desk research, etc.

### Tips from the Interreg programmes:

- Hard data as a result measurement is not suitable for transnational cooperation in particular. The funds of transnational programmes are even more limited when compared to their territory / population than in case of cross-border cooperation.
- The majority of Interreg programmes are opting for survey or focus group based approaches to measure results. For this approach, the design of questionnaires becomes critical to ensure credible results. What questions are to be included in order to achieve an objective outcome of surveys?
- Having too many indicators does not help.
- Use statistics as much as possible.
- Indicators used for data collection need to be explained so that projects understand them in simple terms.
- Establish a clear distinction (using definitions) between results, outputs and deliverables.
- Project evaluations can be a good data source.
- Beneficiary data - keep the effort reasonable, standardised questions introduced in e.g., final reports as standardised annexes is an option
- Link of project and programme evaluation: some programmes plan to make project evaluation for some of its projects compulsory. These projects will be asked to use different methods. The project evaluations will feed into the programme evaluations.

### 3.8. Quality of impact evaluations

#### How can an Interreg programme assure the quality of impact evaluations?

Important considerations for the quality assurance of impact evaluations are:

- Is there a plausible theory of change developed with clear linkages from programme interventions to the outputs of interventions, direct effects on the key direct target group and other impacts on programmes indicators (intervention logic) or other variables?
- Did the evaluators use methods which were proper, given the impact evaluations purpose and specific questions, the type of the programme (sectors, type of interventions), resources and data available?
- Are the impact evaluation(s) report(s) clear on the approach used for answering the questions, methods used, key findings and conclusions? Are the key findings on impacts clearly justified?
- Are the direct and indirect impacts of the programme interventions as much as possible quantified? Are these quantifications plausible related to the data and size of programme and interventions?
- Have important stakeholders of the programme been consulted?
- Do the impact evaluations reports produce practical conclusions and recommendations for improvements of future programs and interventions?

*An evaluation that users consider irrelevant is hardly a success, regardless of its other merits. To be useful, evaluations must be responsive to the interests, perspectives and values of stakeholders. It is important that evaluations are timely in relation to stakeholders' practical agendas, and that stakeholders regard them as credible.*<sup>44</sup>

#### Where can you find more information on quality standards for impact evaluations?

The guidelines from DG REGIO on the evaluation plan are contained in Annex 2 'Guidance on quality management of external evaluations'. Furthermore Annex 3 of the DG REGIO document<sup>45</sup> contains 'A structure of evaluation standards' which also helps in identifying how to ensure good quality in impact evaluations.

<sup>44</sup> Swedish international development cooperation agency: Looking Back, Moving Forward, Sida Evaluation Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, 2007, p.24.

<sup>45</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. February 2015, p.20-26.

### 3.9. Follow-up of the impact evaluations

#### What are the legal requirements for the follow-up of impact evaluations?

The legal requirements for the follow-up of impact evaluations are the following:

- *“All evaluations shall be examined by the monitoring committee and sent to the Commission.” (Art. 56(3) CPR).*
- *“A summary report for each operational programme in December 2022 shall wrap up main evaluation findings and assess main outputs and results, providing comments on the reported information (Art. 114(2) CPR).”*
- *“All evaluations shall be made available to the public” (Art. 54(4) CPR).*

#### How can impact evaluations be used?

Impact evaluations are not just meant to show the impact but are also intended to provide input towards a possible revision of the policy or drafting/implementation of the programme.

Impact evaluations can have several target groups with each having their own purpose:

- **The Monitoring Committee.** As required by the CPR regulation the Monitoring Committee will have to examine the evaluations. The Monitoring Committee can use the impact evaluations to identify if a refocus of the programme is needed and see if/which of the recommendations can/should be implemented.
- **The European Commission.** As required by the CPR regulation the evaluation will have to be sent to the European Commission. It will provide the European Commission useful insights to which extent foreseen effects have been realised and to which extent this has been realised through the ERDF.
- **(Potential) project beneficiaries.** The impact evaluations can be useful for (potential) project beneficiaries, especially when it will include recommendations on which elements the programme is not yet performing well. It can also provide the beneficiaries with insights in which approaches do work and do not work;
- **Policy makers.** The impact evaluations can be a useful document for policy makers in case it will identify which changes have occurred and which changes in policy might still be needed.
- **Programmes.** It can be useful for programmes to identify what other programmes are achieving through their projects. In addition programmes can exchange successful approaches for doing impact evaluations.
- **The wider public.** To be able to show if the tax payers money has been well spent impact evaluations could provide information on the effects of the projects and programmes and to which extent challenges/problems in the regions have been improved by EU funding.

## Annex 1: Useful sources for (impact) evaluations

**EU regulations:** The legal requirements are included in

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provision on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006
  - especially Preamble 54; Article 56 (Evaluation during the programming period); Article 110 (Monitoring and Evaluation. Functions of the monitoring committee); Article 114 (Evaluation).
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal
  - especially Preamble 26; Article 14 (Implementation Reports);

**Working papers - Guidance documents from DG REGIO.**<sup>46</sup> The most relevant documents for impact evaluation(s) are:

- The Programming Period 2014-2020. Guidance document on Monitoring and Evaluation. Cohesion Fund and European Regional Development Fund, Concepts and Recommendations. March 2014.<sup>47</sup>
- The Programming Period 2014-2020. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. European Regional Development, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund. Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans. Terms of References for Impact Evaluation(s). Guidance on Quality Management of External Evaluations. February 2015.<sup>48</sup>
- Theory based evaluation. Based on material produced for DG Regional Policy by Frans L. Leeuw.<sup>49</sup>
- Evaluation of innovation activities. Guidance on methods and practices. European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy. 2012.<sup>50</sup>
- Guidance for the Design of Quantitative Survey-Based Evaluation. Riccardo Scarpa. 2012.<sup>51</sup>
- Guidance for the design of qualitative case study evaluation. Prof Frank Vanclay. 2012.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/evaluations/guidance/#1](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/guidance/#1)

<sup>47</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd\\_2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation\\_plan\\_guidance\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/theory\\_impact\\_guidance.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/theory_impact_guidance.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/eval2007/innovation\\_activities/inno\\_activities\\_guidance\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/eval2007/innovation_activities/inno_activities_guidance_en.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/eval2007/innovation\\_activities/inno\\_activities\\_guidance\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/eval2007/innovation_activities/inno_activities_guidance_en.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/doc/performance/Vanclay.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/doc/performance/Vanclay.pdf)

**EVALSED:** The recently updated Sourcebook now has more information on impact evaluation(s) (Counterfactual and Theory Based Impact Evaluation):

- EVALSED: The resource for the evaluation of Socio -Economic Development, 2013.<sup>53</sup>
- EVALSED Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques.<sup>54</sup>

**Previous experiences on impact evaluations - Experiences from Interreg programmes**

- BIS (2009) RDA Evaluation: Practical Guidance on Implementing the Impact evaluation(s) Framework, 2009.<sup>55</sup>
- Northern Periphery Programme used a case study based evaluation.<sup>56</sup> “Early” and “newly approved” projects were selected to see if the change they produce(d) is comparable / similar, and to establish the different stages of change (immediate, medium-term, longer-term);
- Northern Periphery Programme 2007-2013: Achievements.<sup>57</sup>
- Alpine Space Programme Impact Assessment.<sup>58</sup>
- Midterm evaluation report related to LT-PL CBC Programme impact on Policy Areas.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/guide\\_evalsed.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/guide_evalsed.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/evaluation\\_sourcebook.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/evaluation_sourcebook.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.mbsportal.bl.uk/secure/subjareas/mgmt/bis/1268961559RDAevaluation09.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> [http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/8996/04\\_Presentation\\_Evaluation\\_Plan\\_Event\\_Ole\\_Damsgaard\\_Evaluation\\_Plan\\_Event\\_London\\_2\\_December\\_2014.pdf](http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/8996/04_Presentation_Evaluation_Plan_Event_Ole_Damsgaard_Evaluation_Plan_Event_London_2_December_2014.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.northernperiphery.eu/files/archive/Downloads/About\\_NPP/NPP\\_2007-2013\\_Achievements\\_Report.pdf](http://www.northernperiphery.eu/files/archive/Downloads/About_NPP/NPP_2007-2013_Achievements_Report.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.alpine-space.org/2007-2013/uploads/media/ASP\\_Impact\\_Assessment\\_Report.pdf](http://www.alpine-space.org/2007-2013/uploads/media/ASP_Impact_Assessment_Report.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> <http://lietuva-polska.eu/index.php?912917146>

## Annex 2: Acronyms

CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EC	European Commission
GDP	<i>Gross domestic product</i>
IP	Investment Priorities
MA	Managing Authorities
MC	Monitoring Committee
SFC	System for Fund Management in the European Union
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TA	Technical assistance
ToR	Terms of References

## Annex 3: Which approach to use in a theory based impact evaluation?

Although it can differ according to the method chosen, theory based impact evaluations have normally the following steps:

### Description of the intervention which the programme foresee to change:

1st step: Problem identification and scope of impact evaluation determination. What theory of change is underlying the priority/programme? What are the problems behind the objectives? Which evaluation questions should be answered?

2nd step: What was the baseline situation at the start? Which changes were foreseen (direct, indirect, other impacts)?

3rd step: Which interventions did the programme foresee to achieve the change?

Step 1 and 2 can be derived from the Cooperation Programme (CP). In the Section 1 in the Cooperation Programme the problems and opportunities (SWOT) and the justification of the objective of the investment priority chosen by the programme are described. Often this is a summary from a broader analysis of the programme area which is useful to take into account in the problem identification. As a next step, describe what has been identified as problems and opportunities and why the objective of the investment priority has been selected.

Step 3 can be also derived from the Cooperation Programme, the description of the priority axes (section 2). Describe which interventions were foreseen to achieve the change.

Tip: consider if you want a gap analysis in the impact evaluation. Which elements have not been covered by the Cooperation Programme whereas they are described in the strategy?

### Description of the actual change and impact

4th step: Identify and quantify the impacts (direct, indirect, other impacts)?

5th step: Draft a narrative on the expected and achieved changes and did the programme work as expected to produce the desired change?

For step 4 and 5 research will have to be done. Several methods are described below.

Tip: indicate clearly in the Terms of Reference what should be covered in any case in the impact evaluation (For example, can the contractor revise the evaluation questions or should these be followed, e.g., is the contractor free to choose the method and tool).

Tip: if there is limited budget available, step 1-3 could be done by the programme itself and do not necessarily require an external expert.