

# Summary of proceedings of Interact III Monitoring Committee meetings

## **1<sup>st</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC01)** **28-29 October 2015, Riga, Latvia**

The very first meeting of the Interact III Monitoring Committee was mainly about discussing and approving key programme documents that either provide strategic guidance on content (Multi Annual Work Programme) or facilitate the technical implementation of the programme, like the rules of procedure of the Monitoring Committee, programme-level rules on eligibility of expenditure, subsidy contract template and communication strategy. The work plan for 2016 was also introduced to the Committee and a decision was made to come back to the document and approve it in a written procedure in the beginning of 2016.

The Monitoring Committee also approved the allocation of programme funding in both priorities, Service Delivery and Technical Assistance among beneficiaries. Interact III has five beneficiaries in priority 1: Interact Offices Turku (Finland), Valencia (Spain), Viborg (Denmark) and Vienna (Austria) that actually deliver services to target groups and the Interact Secretariat that is engaged in service delivery coordination activities. Under Technical Assistance, beneficiaries include the Managing, Certifying and Audit Authorities plus the Interact Secretariat that also has a small TA budget.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee (MC02) meeting** **18-19 May 2016, Luxembourg City, Luxembourg**

As the setting up of Interact Office Valencia within a new housing institution (there was no organisational change in the three other offices) suffered delays, the Monitoring Committee thoroughly discussed the issue and set a deadline for hiring the staff of the office.

Service delivery related activities, among them the new visual identity and website of the programme and the new Interreg portal (i.e. a website that serves as a joint gateway to all Interreg programmes) to be set up by Interact were also discussed. The Committee also approved the new *Evaluation plan* of Interact. Based on Member State request, the Committee also discussed the application of certain *simplified cost options* – instruments that can make the life of project beneficiaries as well as programme bodies easier in the 2014-2020 programming period. Furthermore, a needs assessment workshop session also took place during which representatives provided inputs to the Interact's 2017 work plan.

The Monitoring Committee also tackled and approved several documents of technical nature including a modification of the Programme Guide and the 2014-2015 annual report.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee (MC03) meeting 9-10 November 2016, Amsterdam, Netherlands**

Beside the 'business as usual' items of reviewing programme management developments and delivery of services since the previous meeting, the committee discussed and eventually approved Interact's work plan for 2017 – including the priority 1 budget for 2017 – that was developed taking account of the inputs collected at the previous meeting. Monitoring Committee representatives had the opportunity to discuss selected work packages of the work plan in group discussions.

Concerning service delivery, the main focus of the meeting was on capitalisation: the programme introduced its new capitalisation plan that shall be basis to achieve a consolidated view of capitalisation on Interreg level, define objectives and activities for Interact capitalisation work. Concrete examples of Interact thematic capitalisation work were provided based on the example of migration.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee (MC04) meeting 17-18 May 2017, Bratislava, Slovakia**

For the first time since Bratislava Self Governing Region became the Managing Authority of Interact Programme, the Monitoring Committee met in Bratislava. We used this opportunity and included a project visit, so the Monitoring Committee members got to know projects supported through Interreg Programmes in Slovakia. Participants highly praised the possibility to see the results of cooperation in person, not only on paper or via presentation.

The committee welcomed the information by the Audit Authority, that the designation process of Interact Programme was successfully completed. Apart from the standing topics (events and tools delivered in 2016 and January-March 2017; financial implementation of the programme, etc.), committee members also discussed synergies between funding sources (Interreg, cross border programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument and Interreg-IPA, national programmes) and Interact work on Interreg post-2020.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC05) 14-15 November 2017, St Julian's, Malta**

First of all, the Monitoring Committee discussed the state of play of several projects in Interact's 2017 work plan with special emphasis on Interact's work related to the future of Interreg in the 2021-2027 programming period, the [Interreg portal](#) developed by Interact as well as the new set of Interact IT tools. As a result of these discussions, the Monitoring Committee agreed on the role that Interact should play in the discussions related to the future of Interreg.

In a separate interactive workshop session, Monitoring Committee representatives had an opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation of Interact's strategy paper, the Multi Annual Work Programme, approved back at the first Monitoring Committee meeting. As in

most autumn meetings, the Monitoring Committee also tackled and eventually approved the 2018 work plan of the programme – the document that will be the basis of all service delivery activities through the year.

Finally, the Committee reviewed the state of play of programme evaluation as well as the latest developments concerning programme management and programme finances.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC06) 15-16 May 2018, Tallinn, Estonia**

As usual in the spring meetings, the Monitoring Committee discussed and approved Interact's annual report of the previous year, this time the report covering 2017.

According to an agreement made at the previous, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, Interact prepared an updated version of the 2018 annual work plan taking into account all developments and changes in the needs of target groups since the approval of the work plan at the November 2017 meeting. The Monitoring Committee approved this updated version of the work plan. Interact also introduced the comprehensive document 'Progress towards Multi Annual Work Programme medium-term strategies' to the Monitoring Committee that gives a detailed overview of the state of play of implementation of Interacts strategy. This document was requested by the Committee at the previous meeting.

Committee representatives highly appreciated presentations of Norway and the Gelderland Region of the Netherlands on how they visualise results of Interreg programmes and projects.

Last but not least, the Monitoring Committee – being highly satisfied with the work of the programme – expressed support to start preparations of the programming process of Interact IV 2021-2027 and to set up a Programming Task Force comprising representatives of the participating countries.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC07) 6-7 November 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Committee meeting kicked off with a discussion of Interact IV, the successor to the current Interact (III) programme, which is due to run in 2021-2017. The work to date, which commenced in Autumn 2018, was summarised and an overview of the timeline for launching the new programme was shared. Due to the close relationship between this matter and the current programming process, the meeting then considered the finances of Interact III.

The Committee then considered the progress in implementing the 2018 work plan. A number of key projects were highlighted as part of focus on outputs thus far, including the work on Interreg in the next programming period and the 2018 European Cooperation Day campaign.

Interact's 2019 work plan was reviewed and approved by the Monitoring Committee. The ambitious plan will see 134 events (including trainings, workshops, working group meetings and conferences) and 39 tools (such as online courses, guidance documents, studies, templates and new releases of the programme developed monitoring system) delivered to support cooperation programmes.

The Committee then discussed the evolving legislative proposals of the European Commission for the 2021-2027 programme period, including a number of specific provisions of key interest for Interreg programmes.

Finally, the meeting concluded with a discussion on the progress of the evaluation of Interact III and the latest developments in programme management including staffing and audits.

#### **8<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC08) 28-29 May 2019, Salzburg, Austria**

In the first session of the 8<sup>th</sup> MC meeting, participants looked at the events and tools that were delivered in 2018 (98 events and 59 tools). Interact's outputs during the first quarter of 2019 were also presented. The latest developments in some key projects were highlighted in further detail, including support to programmes in the outermost regions, work on EGTCs, [keep.eu](#), and [European Cooperation Day 2019](#).

Interact's 2018 annual report was presented to the Monitoring Committee and approved, subject to minor comments. Following the meeting, the Managing Authority submitted the report to the European Commission ahead of the 30 June deadline.

In the third session, external experts presented the evaluation of five key long-term projects. The five projects evaluated were *Harmonised Implementation Tools*, *electronic Monitoring System*, *keep.eu database*, *harmonised branding for Interreg and Interact support to macro-regional strategies*. The outcome of their evaluation was presented to the Monitoring Committee, which included a main conclusion that all five projects had a positive impact on their target groups by contributing to improved practises and changed mindsets in programme bodies.

The future of the current electronic Monitoring System (eMS) was then discussed. The eMS is a programme monitoring system developed by Interact and made available for cooperation programmes free of charge – saving up to €20 million versus an uncoordinated approach. The MC accepted a number of improvement proposals from the participating countries and eventually gave a green light to start the preparations for this big project.

The programme also presented its updated work plan for 2019 that the Monitoring Committee duly approved. This updated version is based on the latest needs of Interact's stakeholders and foresees the delivery of some 135 events and 41 tools in 2019.

As usual, the latest developments regarding programme management and programme finances were also presented to the Committee.

Finally, the meeting ended with a discussion of the latest developments in the preparations for the new programming period 2021-2027 and with the agreement on the next steps in the programming process of Interact IV, the successor of the current Interact III programme.

### **9<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC09) 3-4 December 2020, Bucharest, Romania**

Our 9<sup>th</sup> MC meeting started as usual, the participants reviewed the major events and tools delivered in the first three quarters of 2019, followed by a situation update on programme management issues and programme finances, except that these parts were shorter, to allow more time for the main topic of the meeting, the new Interreg community monitoring system for the 2021-2027 programming period.

Similar to the current (2014-2020) programming period, Interact will offer a complete monitoring system supporting the whole programme and project life cycle and fulfilling all EU legal requirements for interested Interreg programmes free of charge also in the next period. In order to make the first modules of the software (e.g. core database and project application form) available on time, the MC had to make a decision on the development project already at the end of 2019. After clarifying all necessary technical, management, financial and legal aspects, the MC eventually gave a green light for the project. That made it possible for our office in Vienna, Austria to start procurement of an external company that will carry out the software development work. We expect to deliver the first modules of the new system to Interreg programmes by mid-2021.

The Committee also agreed to reallocate part of the programme budget to cover the costs of the new monitoring system development. This, together with smaller administrative changes, required changing the Interact III cooperation programme document. Based on the approval of the Committee, the Managing Authority of Interact III will send the revised programme document to the European Commission.

Finally, the MC discussed in detail and eventually approved with minor changes Interact's work plan for 2020.

### **10<sup>th</sup> Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC10) 24 June 2020, Online**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Committee meeting of Interact III took place online due to COVID-19 crisis. The meeting was chaired by the representative of the Republic of Finland.

The Monitoring Committee approved some technical updates to the key programme level documents, covering rules of procedure of the Monitoring Committee as well as programme level rules on eligibility of expenditure. Interact also outlined the results of the 'Use and

Satisfaction Survey' that collected information from key stakeholders on their satisfaction with and use of Interact products and services in the 2018-2019 period.

Next, Interact introduced the latest developments of the new post 2020 electronic monitoring system. This project aims to deliver a monitoring system software available to any interested Interreg programme free of charge in the programming period 2021-2027. As usual Certifying Authority presented up to date information on programme finances.

The Monitoring Committee also tackled the participation of colleagues from CBC programmes with UK involvement – and therefore affected by Brexit – in Interact post 2020-related events. In the last session Interact presented adjusted Joint Annual Work Plan 2020 – the update was necessary as the COVID-19 crisis has forced all Interact physical events planned until August 2020 to go online.

#### **11th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC11) 5 October 2020, Online**

The 11th Monitoring Committee of Interact III took place online due to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency. The meeting was again chaired by the representative of the Republic of Finland.

In the first session the Monitoring Committee discussed technical updates to programme level rules on eligibility of expenditure. Interact also introduced updated Joint Annual Work Plan 2020, version 3.0, which responded to the COVID-19 situation and that fact that no more physical events were foreseen in 2020. Furthermore, new 2021 planning principles were discussed and agreed. As such, only online delivery of events is foreseen for the first half of the year 2021, and detailed work planning would be amended to enable flexibility to respond as the situation changes in 2021.

The Audit Authority and Certifying Authority provided up to date information on programme finances as well as on performed audits since the last Monitoring Committee meeting.

Finally, the external evaluators from European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde (EPRC) gave an overview on the work done on operational evaluation of the Interact III Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, including the evaluation of the implementation of the communication strategy.

#### **12th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC12) 9 December 2020, Online**

The 12th Monitoring Committee of Interact III took place online due to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency. The meeting was chaired by the representative of the Republic of Croatia.

Firstly, the Monitoring Committee approved the Interact III Joint Annual Work Plan 2021, version 1.0. Following the agreement in MC11, events in the first half of 2021 are planned online only, due to the COVID-19 health crisis.

As usual the Monitoring Committee reviewed programme management developments concerning finances and audits.

Near the end of the meeting, the European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde (EPRC) presented the final draft of the Interact Operational Evaluation report that will be finalised in January 2021 after considering all MC recommendations.

### **13th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC13) 18 May 2021, online**

The 13th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting took place online due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. The meeting was chaired by the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In the first session the participants looked at the events and tools that were delivered in 2020 (154 events and 84 tools) and the Monitoring Committee approved the submission of the 2020 Annual Implementation Report to the European Commission.

Next, the Monitoring Committee approved the Interact III Joint Annual Work Plan 2021, version 2.0. Events planned for the second half of 2021 remain online, due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The latest developments in the key projects were highlighted in further detail.

Interact also introduced the latest developments of [Jems](#) (the new monitoring system for the 2021-2027 period specifically for Interreg programmes): the official launch event took place on 30 March 2021 and so far, 24 cooperation programmes have signed license agreement for the use of the system.

In the second part of the meeting the Monitoring Committee reviewed the follow up on systemic audit findings and measures implemented.

At the same time, information on the preparation of the Interact III impact evaluation was provided. The composition of Impact Evaluation Advisory Group was agreed.

At the end of the meeting the Monitoring Committee reviewed developments on Interact programme finances and audits. Currently the closure of Interact III and transition to Interact IV is scheduled for the third quarter of 2022.

### **14th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC14) 13 December 2021, online**

Chaired by the representative of Portugal, the 14th Interact III Monitoring Committee meeting took place online on 13 December 2021.

First, the Committee looked at Interact outputs delivered from the beginning of 2021 until the end of September – the number of events organised, tools published and the progress towards programme targets as well as satisfaction of event participants.

Then the Committee discussed programme management issues, among them the closure of the current Interact III (2014-2020) programme, the transition to [Interact IV \(2021-2027\)](#), finances including budget reallocations between programme bodies, audits and changes in the [Interact team](#).

The next topic was Interact's 2022 work plan, including the 2022 service delivery budget that the Committee approved without comments. Interact plans to organise nearly 180 events and deliver more than 50 tools to managers of Interreg and other cooperation programmes over the year.

Finally, external evaluators of the European Policies Research Centre (University of Strathclyde and Delft Technical University) presented the state of play of the Interact impact evaluation exercise. The main point of this assignment is to assess the impact of Interact services on target groups, how these services are used and their effect on the capacities of cooperation programmes and other stakeholders.

#### **15th INTERACT III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC15) 22 June, Bled, Slovenia**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Committee meeting was held in situ for the first time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was chaired by the representative of the Republic of Slovenia, and was held in Bled, Slovenia.

The beginning of the Monitoring Committee meeting was mainly devoted to the Interact Impact Evaluation report, and the results were presented by the Deputy Evaluator of the European Policies Research Centre (EPRC), Ms Irene McMaster. The evaluation was very positive, and the evaluator concluded that Interact is working very effectively, meeting its objectives, and overall, the target groups are delighted with provided services. The full report can be found on the [Interact website](#).

Next, the Monitoring Committee approved the updated Work Plan 2022, version 2.0.

Then the Interact Office Vienna presented the state of play of the [Jems](#), a community-based electronic monitoring system specifically developed for Interreg programmes of the 2021-2027 programming period.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to programme management. In the context of Interact III closure, the Monitoring Committee approved updated Rules on eligibility of expenditures.

The representatives of the Audit Authority and Certifying Authority reported on programme finances as well as on performed audits since the last Monitoring Committee meeting. The

Managing Authority also presented the 2021 Annual implementation report of the programme including output indicators.

### **16th INTERACT III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC16)** **15 December, Paris, France**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by the representative of France and was held in Paris, France.

At the beginning of the meeting, the actions, and the follow-up recommendations of the Interact III Impact Evaluation were presented.

The next item on the agenda was presentation of Interact outputs delivered between January and October 2022. In total, 109 events were organised, and 42 tools were created. Data on the number of participants and their satisfaction with the quality of the services provided were also presented and followed by the discussion. All the suggestions will be used to develop the evaluation methodology for the new programming period.

The meeting continued with the presentation on the current status of the closure of Interact III, specific information related to the financial closure of the programme in particular and the transition to Interact IV. As part of the information on the implementation of the programme, the representatives of the Certifying Authority presented information on programme finances and the auditors gave an overview of the audits carried out since the last Monitoring Committee meeting.

### **17th INTERACT III Monitoring Committee meeting (MC17)** **30 May, Prague, Czech Republic**

The 17<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Committee meeting was held in situ in Prague, Czech Republic and chaired by the Czech representative.

The beginning of the meeting was mainly devoted to information about the successful closure of the Interact III programme. The meeting continued with details on the implementation of the programme. The spending on the programme level reached 99.3%. As usual, the Monitoring Committee reviewed programme management developments on finances and audits.

Subsequently, Interact presented the Annual Implementation Report 2022 of the programme, and the Monitoring Committee approved its submission to the European Commission.

The next and last item on the agenda was the presentation of the final performance of Interact III. The programme held 946 events and developed 454 tools during the implementation period 2016-2022. Interact welcomed 26 531 participants at its events, and almost half of

the events took place online. The presentations also addressed satisfaction with the quality of services provided. Interact met all programme indicators demonstrating the programme preparation and implementation quality.