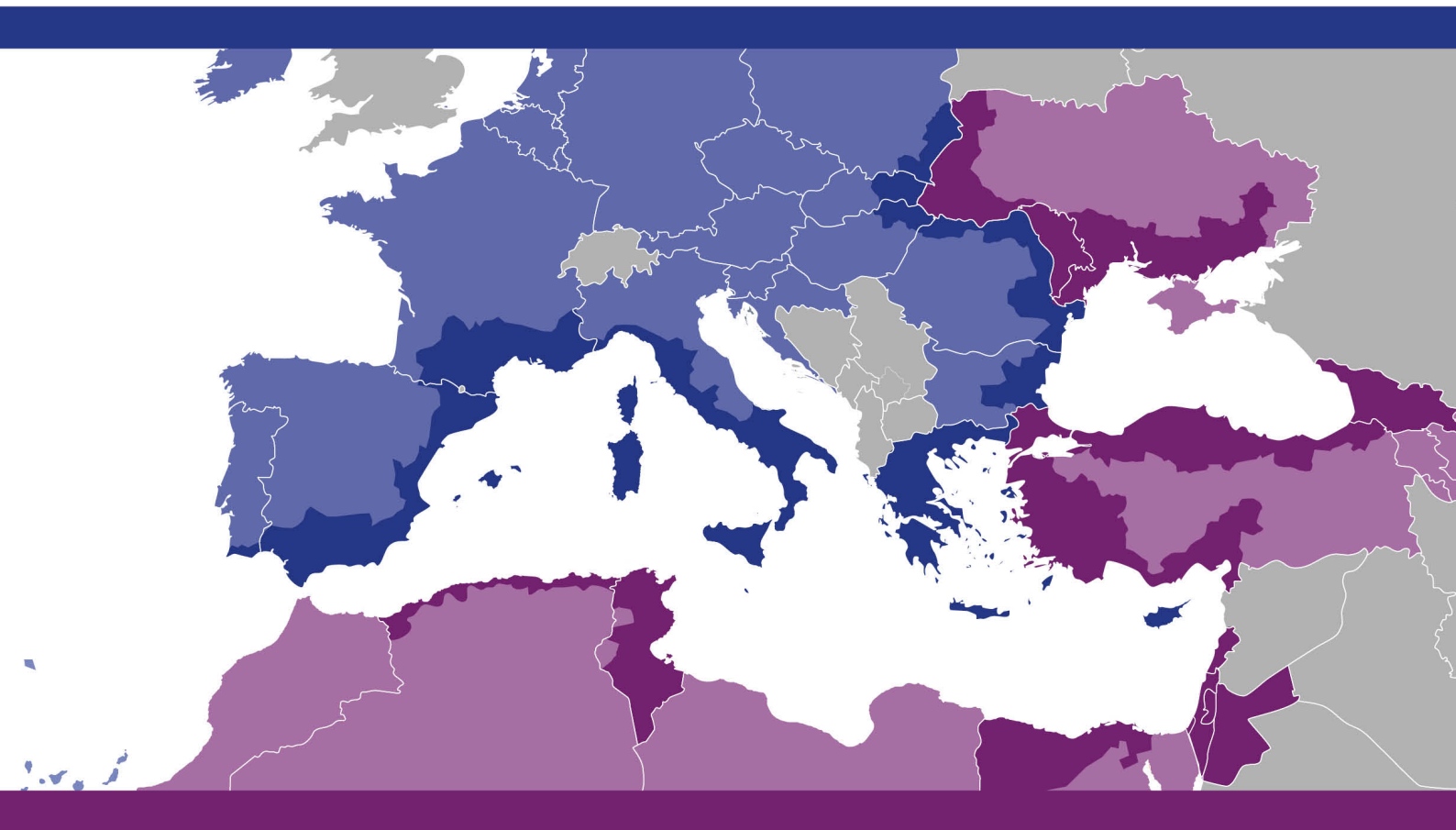


HIT Tools in Interreg NEXT

Bridging the ENI CBC experiences and templates with those of the wider Interreg community

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1. Introduction

For the first time, the neighbourhood cross-border cooperation programmes will be fully-fledged members of the wider Interreg community.

One of the opportunities provided by this novelty is the possibility of **drawing inspiration from the broader community of practices**. With the support of [Interact](#), the Interreg programmes have worked since 2019 in developing the so-called [Harmonised Implementation Tools \(HIT Tools\)](#), including documents and templates for project selection, contracting, reporting and control.

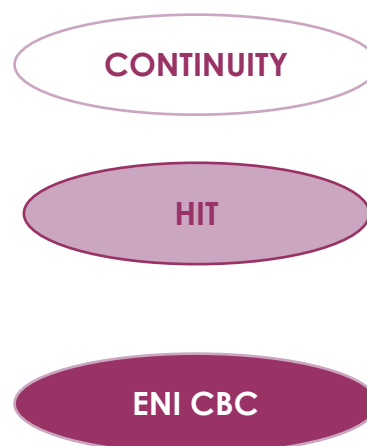
TESIM has participated in this development process for the programming period 2021-2027, ensuring that the specificities of external cooperation programmes were duly understood and, where relevant, incorporated into the different documents and templates.

Moreover, we have issued two products to **promote the use of HIT tools by Interreg NEXT programmes**:

- In this document we highlight the continuity and the twist elements identified when comparing the ENI CBC practices and the approach of HIT Tools;
- We have also developed a short online *crash course* on HIT Tools based on this document; you can find it at tesim.podia.com!

In the chapters below you will find suggestions on **developing the programme templates using the HIT Tools as basis**. These suggestions are based on the comparison of the ENI CBC practices and the HIT Tools and are identified in accordance with the following labels:

- Overall degree of continuity of the HIT Tools with the ENI CBC practices.
- Novelties brought by the HIT Tools when compared to ENI CBC documents and practices.
- ENI CBC practices that could be added to the proposed HIT Tools.



Whether you simply want to adapt your tools or plan to use the HIT Tools as a starting point, if you are an Interreg NEXT programme representative responsible for developing documents and templates for project selection, contracting, reporting, or control, you have come to the right place!

2. HIT Tools in Interreg NEXT

All Interreg NEXT programmes can benefit from the HIT Tools by using them as a source of inspiration. The documents are based on the expertise of Interreg programmes over several periods of implementation and are in line with the legal provisions, making these documents a good benchmark for programmes!

The following **four packages** are at the core of the HIT Tools:



The programmes that have selected JEMS as their information management system are bound to use HIT templates, at least to some extent. However, as noted above, even the programmes that have chosen other management and monitoring systems can benefit from the HIT tools.

3. HIT Tools for project selection

3.1. Overview of the templates

The following templates are included in the package of [HIT Tools for project selection](#):

- Project application form;
- Project application budget;
- Project and project partner statements;
- Admission and eligibility criteria;
- Quality assessment criteria;
- State-aid plugin;
- Supplementary information.

The templates, procedures and criteria developed by ENPI CBC and ENI CBC programmes have served the purpose of selecting the projects that best contribute to the programme objectives. This experience, combined with the good practice examples in the HIT Tools selection package, is an excellent starting point.

3.2. Project application form

CONTINUITY

❖ General aspects

The proposed structure of the application form, based on work packages, is like the one used by the ENI CBC programmes.

HIT

❖ Deliverables

In addition to activities, outputs and results, the project intervention logic in the HIT application also includes deliverables.

❖ Long-term plans

In the HIT template there is a strong emphasis on requesting the project to describe long-term plans after the end of the implementation, with three separate subchapters devoted to ownership, durability and transferability. These elements, while present in the ENI CBC application forms, were often combined into one general requirement.

❖ Communication

Unlike the ENI CBC approach, communication is NOT a separate project work package. Instead, communication activities are embedded into the work packages to ensure their strong relation with the thematic activities of the project.

ENI CBC

❖ Procurement

In some ENI CBC programmes, a procurement plan was required as a separate annex. As a complementary element to the HIT approach, this experience can be relevant for the future programmes, in particular when planning the projects with significant investments in infrastructure!

❖ Capacity of applicants

In some ENI CBC programmes, information on the operational and financial capacity was requested as part of the application package. As a complementary element to HIT suggestions, this practice might be useful for designing the application package the future projects, in particular if the capacity of the applicants has been an issue in the past.

3.3. Project application budget

CONTINUITY

❖ General aspects

In general, there is a high degree of customisation of the HIT template, allowing to edit, remove or replace non-essential components. This allows the programmes to ensure continuity with the ENI CBC approaches, modifying specific elements where necessary.

HIT

❖ From partner to project budget

The core of the HIT template is each project partner's budget, which is automatically summarised to arrive at the joint project budget. This principle should be already familiar to the ENI CBC programmes, even if the layout and structure of the content are somewhat different.

❖ Multi-fund feature

The ENI CBC programmes are funded from multiple sources (NDICI, ERDF, co-financing on various levels). Therefore, it is important to foresee this option also at project level. The HIT template offers the possibility to identify the necessary budget sources (NDICI, ERDF, etc) and fits to the realities of the Interreg NEXT programmes.

3.4. Quality assessment criteria

CONTINUITY

❖ Strategic and operational criteria

The HIT approach suggests dividing the quality assessment criteria in two groups: strategic assessment and operational assessment. While criteria are similar, there was a slightly different approach to labelling and arranging them in many ENI CBC programmes, where the first group (selection) referred to the applicant's capacity to implement the projects, while the second group (award) concerned the quality of the proposal against the set priorities.

HIT

❖ Cross-border dimension

There is even stronger attention to the cross-border element in the HIT quality assessment criteria than in the ENI CBC or

Interreg 2014-2020 programmes. HIT suggests looking at the cross-border dimension as encompassing three aspects:

- in the topic addressed by the projects,
- in the results strived for by the project,
- in the benefits brought to the final beneficiaries of the project.

❖ Project long-term impact

When comparing with the approach of the past, there is an increased prominence on assessing project impacts beyond its lifetime. A separate criterion is dedicated to assessing the impact of the project beyond its lifetime with attention to two elements: 1) durability of project outputs and 2) replicability/transferability of the outputs outside the partnership. This approach is directly linked with the requirement of the HIT application form to describe long-term plans of the project (as referred to in chapter 3.2).

ENI CBC

❖ Cross-referencing

In some of the ENI CBC programmes, the criteria already provided the references to particular chapters of the application form, allowing the assessor to locate the necessary information easier. In addition to the HIT suggestions, this technical feature could be helpful also for Interreg NEXT when designing both the selection criteria and application forms.

3.5. Other templates

Admission and Eligibility criteria	Familiar approach to the one used in the ENI CBC programmes, easily adaptable to Interreg NEXT.
Project and project partner statements	Familiar approach to the one used in the ENI CBC programmes, easily adaptable to Interreg NEXT. A solid emphasis on stating legal obligations such as legal and financial capacity, double financing and confirmation to comply with respective procurement rules.
State-aid plugin	Familiar approach to the one used in the ENI CBC programmes, easily adaptable to Interreg NEXT.
Supplementary information	An additional template that can be used to gather other project contact information.

4. HIT Tools for project contracting

4.1. Overview of the templates

The following templates are included in the package of [HIT Tools for project selection](#):

- Co-financing contract;
- Partnership agreement.

The contract documents (grant and partnership agreements) proposed in the HIT Tools contain almost all the elements used in the ENI CBC programmes, and their use ensures therefore a high degree of continuity. At the same time, HIT introduces a new approach to contract building compared to ENI CBC practices.

4.2. Co-financing contract¹

CONTINUITY

❖ Comparability

Over 90% of the elements proposed in the HIT Tools were already used in the ENI CBC programmes' project contract documents. There is therefore a high degree of continuity regarding the structure.

Moreover, and since the grant contract is the primary legal document for the implementation of the projects, TESIM already indicated the key Interreg NEXT-specific elements during the HIT template development, such as:

- legal references;
- pre-financing payment approach;
- recovery aspects.

HIT

❖ Legal succession

The HIT template suggests a clause on legal succession (article 10 in the HIT co-financing agreement template and

¹ Grant contract under ENI CBC.

article 13 in the partnership agreement template) that is a novelty in the context of many ENI CBC grant contracts. It is designed to provide legal clarity to the Managing Authorities. Considering the increased external risks affecting the beneficiaries, such a clause can be helpful in Interreg NEXT programmes.

ENI CBC

❖ Additional clauses

In addition to the content suggested by the HIT template, in some cases it could be useful to maintain some clauses used in ENI CBC grant contracts that are relevant to the project implementation also in Interreg NEXT, such as:

- detailed payment conditions;
- procurement obligations;
- dedicated article on conflict of interest;
- dedicated article on the role of the Lead partner.

4.3. Partnership agreement

CONTINUITY

❖ General aspects

The aspects mentioned for the co-financing contract in chapter above are also relevant in the case of the partnership agreement.

HIT

❖ Additional annexes

The HIT approach suggests the following annexes to the partnership agreement:

- detailed tasks and budget allocation;
- decision-making procedure within the partnership.

❖ Disclosure of information

In addition, a specific practice introduced by the HIT proposal relates to the disclosure of sensitive or confidential information.

The Managing Authorities might clarify in the partnership agreement the obligation of the project partners to inform the relevant programme bodies if any sensitive or confidential information related to the project may not be published or made publicly available.

ENI CBC

❖ Additional clauses

In addition to the content suggested by the HIT template, the ENI CBC partnership agreements include several additional clauses that are relevant to the project implementation such as:

- payments from the Lead Partner to partners;
- a specific clause on inadequate project implementation;
- a separate article about ownership/use of results.

5. HIT Tools for reporting

5.1. Overview of the templates

The following templates are included in the package of [HIT Tools for project reporting](#):

- Project progress report;
- Partner progress report;
- Project and partner financial report template
- Monitoring checklist;
- Task assignment template.

Due to the similar structure of projects both in Interreg and ENI CBC programmes, the approach proposed for reporting by HIT is similar to the approach in ENI CBC and will be familiar to any Interreg NEXT practitioner.

5.2. Project and partner progress report

CONTINUITY

❖ General aspects

The HIT application form and the report template follow a coherent structure. This approach should be familiar also to the ENI CBC practitioners. In particular, the approach of using cross-references (structure of the report template following the content application form) can be used if you only adapt part of the HIT documents or even develop your own.

HIT

❖ **Outputs and results achieved**

A useful and practical feature of the HIT reporting templates is the overview of the outputs and results achieved. The tracking of outputs and results was part of the monitoring of the ENI CBC projects as well, but the programmes can benefit from the automatic features of the exercise in the future. If your IT system allows, it is advised to include a joint overview of the project outputs, programme output indicators and result indicators summary table, highlighting the achieved values in the reporting period and the overall progress.

❖ **Reporting on horizontal principles**

The HIT reporting templates also foresee reporting on the horizontal principles (sustainable development, equal opportunities, equality) applied in the project. While horizontal principles are well known to the ENI CBC programme, their increased importance implies that it is an essential detail to track, especially if the programme already in the project application stage requires detailed information on these aspects.

❖ **Work package approach**

A specific aspect of monitoring inspired by the HIT application form design is tracking the achievement of the project objectives per work packages. This approach can help with a detailed monitoring the project progress and react swiftly in case there is risk of underachievement.

5.3. Other templates

<p>Project and partner financial report</p>	<p>Similar conclusions as to the application form budget (described in 3.2.2).</p>
<p>Monitoring checklist</p>	<p>While it seems obvious, a useful feature of HIT checklist is cross-referencing the questions to the specific chapters of the progress report. Such approach allows more efficient monitoring work.</p>
<p>Task assignment template</p>	<p>An additional template can be used for part-time employees to fix the tasks and the percentage of the working time involved.</p>

6. HIT Tools for control

6.1. Overview of the templates

The following templates are included in the package of [HIT Tools for project control](#):

- Control certificate;
- Control report and checklist;
- HIT methodology for risk-based management verifications.

The control of the expenditure is a relatively standardised work process that both in the Interreg and ENI CBC programmes involved checks of the items reported and concludes on the eligibility of the presented costs and overall progress. In the future Interreg programmes this process will be called management verifications.

HIT proposes a control report and checklist templates, as well as guidance on the risk-based management verifications that can serve the Interreg NEXT programmes as valuable inputs!

6.2. Guidance on the risk-based management verifications and methodology

❖ TESIM guidance is already available!

The risk-based method is an essential **methodological novelty** compared to ENI CBC practices. The methodology for risk-based management verifications provided by the HIT Tools offers a harmonised approach and may act as starting point towards the development of a programme-specific methodology. A detailed body of work on this topic is carried out by Interact and by TESIM.

On our side, in April 2023 we released **Podia** dedicated to risk-based management verifications (tesim.podia.com) and several helpful **guidance documents** that you can already find in our [Library](#)!

We also discussed the topics with the Managing Authorities of the Interreg NEXT programmes in the dedicated workshop held in December 2022. If you are interested in the **event materials**, you can find [them here](#)!



6.3. Verification checklists and templates

CONTINUITY

❖ General aspects

The core of the HIT templates can be directly used by the Interreg NEXT programmes, even if adaptations might be implemented as necessary.

There are differences between the legal basis for the verification process in the ENI CBC programmes and the HIT approach. In the ENI CBC programmes, the control process had to adhere to the International Standard on Related Services 4400 (Engagements to perform Agreed-upon Procedures regarding Financial Information), which implied a particular structure and content of the reports. However, the underlying notion that the controller issues a statement on the factual findings of his/her work is similar in both cases.

ENI CBC

❖ Additional templates

Based on the ENI CBC experience, the programmes might also consider providing a template for the contract between the beneficiary and the controller. That would allow for a harmonised expenditure verification process and ensure adequate quality control of the controllers' performance.

Developing a separate harmonised template for the report to be issued in case of suspected fraud could also be beneficial.

TESIM's document "Carrying out management verifications in the Interreg NEXT programmes" will focus on these two additional templates. In April 2023 the document will be published in our online [Library](#).

7. Closing remarks

Together with the valuable fundament represented by your own ENI CBC experience, the HIT tools offer a great starting point for the design of procedures and templates in your Interreg NEXT programme.

We hope that with this document you have received inspiration for developing them and finding the most appropriate solutions!

