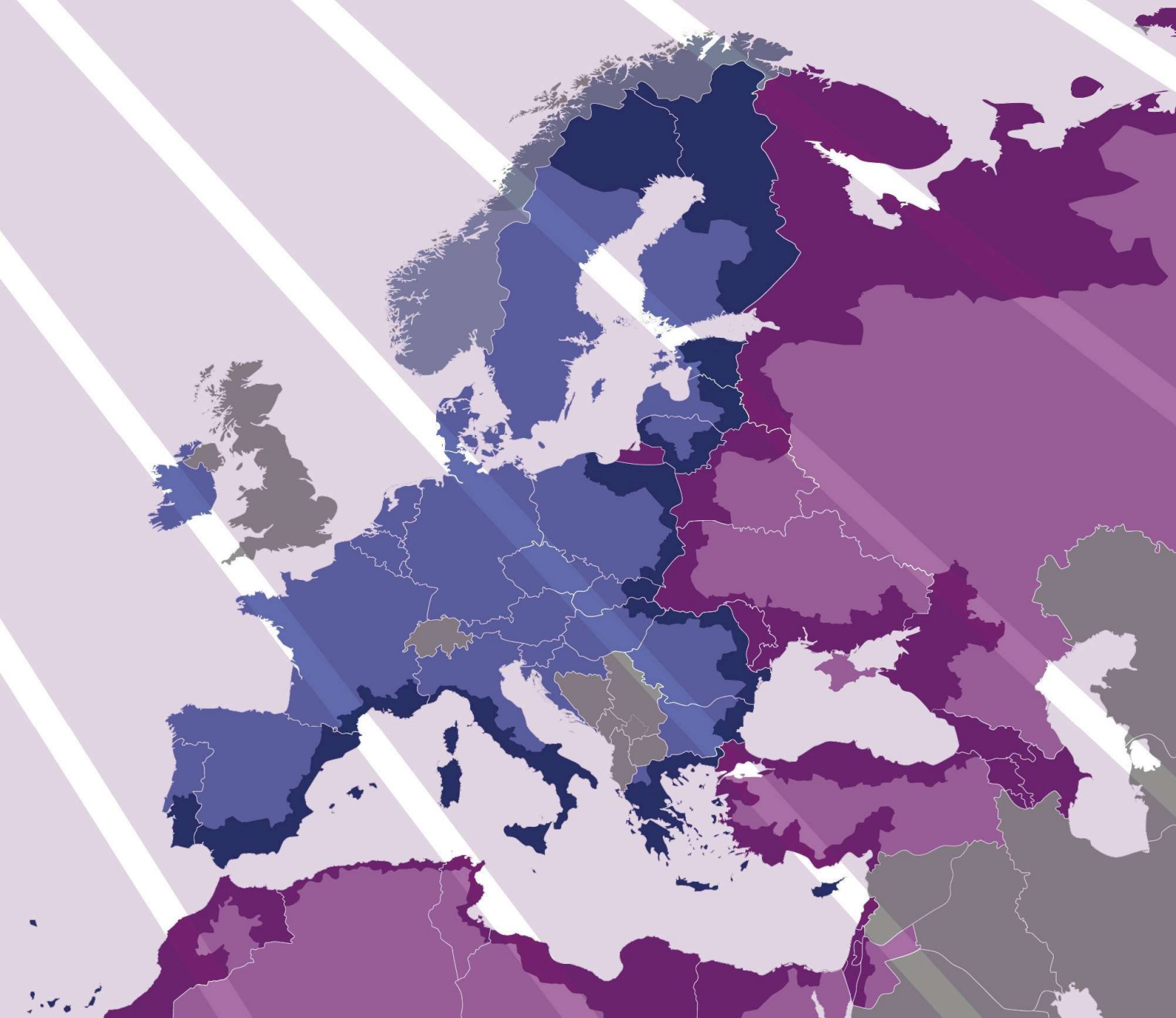


“Moving to the NEXT level!”

Questions and answers from Interreg NEXT cluster events

(Note: this is to be regarded as a living document until the texts of the regulations covering Interreg programmes are finalized)



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PROGRAMMING INPUTS

1. Is the territorial analysis an integral part of the cooperation programme?

The territorial analysis is a core step of the programming process and its conclusions shall be an integral part of the programme document. More specifically, these conclusions shall be provided in sections 1.2 “*Summary of main joint challenges [...]*” and 1.3 “*Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg specific objectives [...]*”. When it comes to the territorial analysis document, it is not a mandatory requirement to annex it to the programme document.

2. When will it be definitely confirmed that PO2 is compulsory and ISOs are optional? Is PO4 compulsory only for internal Interreg programmes?

The final outcome of the Trilogue negotiations on 2 December on the Interreg regulation state that at least 60% of the EU funds are to be allocated to PO2 and a maximum of two other POs. The choice of ISOs is optional (still they both have a maximum threshold of the share of allocation which can be given to them) and PO4 is compulsory only for the *internal* Interreg programmes.

3. How to put together thematic concentration and decrease of financial envelope for the programmes?

One is the natural consequence of the other: the thematic concentration will allow to demonstrate and achieve impact within the limited financial resources available to the programmes. In other words, the thematic focus as a tool to maximise the results of the programme via the concentration of the funds.

4. Are there any tips/recommendations on how the tourism-related specific objective should be connected to the purpose of PO4?

The integration of tourism-related objectives and activities under PO4 was discussed in the event on tourism and culture in PO4 and PO5, organised by the EC and Interact on 15 December 2020 (meeting materials available [here](#)). Tourism and culture can be supported under any PO, where relevant, and when the intervention logic of the programme focuses on the specific policy objectives. When it comes to PO4, the specific objective 4.5 was introduced following the Covid-19 crisis, with the political intention to support the tourism and culture socio-economic sectors. The intention of SO 4.5 is to link it primarily to the recovery of the tourism and culture and it makes possible to bundle all the actions on tourism and culture under the same objective. Therefore, the inclusion of SO 4.5 should be based on a clear narrative in line with the intention (e.g., socio-economic development).

FINANCING AGREEMENTS

5. *When are expected the amendments to the current financing agreements?*

For all the programmes which decide to use the new deadlines for programme and project implementation stipulated in the modification of the ENI CBC Implementing Rules, the provisions on the deadlines of the financing agreements will need to be modified. At the moment when the EC is notified about the modification of the programme document concerning the deadlines or at the adoption by the EC of a major modification including this change, the procedure may start.

6. *How will the preparation and signature of financing agreements be organised?*

It will depend on the options taken by the programme. Most, if not all programmes, will decide to have one document with the implementing provisions. In such case, the document will be signed by three parties. The important milestone is the signature and, even if organised in the simplest way possible, there will have to be physical signatures by authorised persons.

7. *How can the provisions of the financing agreements be translated into tools allowing them to become a reality? (e.g., transfers, liabilities, operational CCP)*

The EC assumes that everyone who signs a financing agreement takes a commitment to fulfil all the provisions contained in it. However, in some cases there may be problems in their implementation. If someone is aware of such situations, the EC may try to tackle this issue in a straighter forward way in the text of the future financing agreements. In any case, there will be provisions, as they exist now, for suspension or dispute/misunderstanding between the parties who sign.

8. *How can national and regional procedures be reviewed, so that they do not become an obstacle for smooth implementation of the provisions of the financing agreement? (e.g., obligation to review partnership agreements of local authorities by Leningrad Oblast)*

In some Partner Countries we find additional procedures for project selections and/or implementation. Nevertheless, from the EC's point of view, the financing agreement is a binding document and all Partner Countries must commit themselves to proceed according to the rules negotiated. The future text will add an article on the cooperation principle in the understanding that each party signing the document will do whatever possible not to complicate the programme implementation.

INTERVENTION LOGIC, PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK AND INDICATORS

9. *How to make the indicators serve both, the monitoring purpose and at the same time tell the programme story?*

The titles of common indicators alone might not tell much about what a programme is doing, as these indicators are quite generic. However, when linked to the chain of the intervention logic and combined with the other elements (e.g., with the specific objective and the type of action), they can present a picture of what the programme is doing. Where relevant, the Managing Authority can also define programme specific output and result indicators in addition to the common indicators.

10. *It is very good that the collection of indicators are eligible costs. Does it mean that collection of data and surveys can be financed from the programme technical assistance?*

The draft regulation says that the costs of actions for implementing the indicator system and collection of data are eligible cost.

11. *Shall the common output and result indicators be used only “in pairs”, as suggested in the indicator fiches? Can different pairs be formed from what is suggested?*

In the indicator fiches the links suggested between the output and result indicators are the best fit suggested by the EC. However, their use in these exact pairs is not mandatory. If there is a better fit based on the intervention logic of the particular programme, it can be used as well. Only, in this case the programme will have to describe the link between the output and the result indicators in the performance framework methodology document.

Please also note that the link between the output and result indicators does not necessarily mean that there is one output indicator linked to one result indicator. It is possible that there are several output indicators contributing to one result, and the other way around, one output indicator can contribute to several result indicators.

12. *Will the EC request the performance framework methodological document together with the submission of the Interreg programme? As it is a new requirement for Interreg NEXT programmes, is there a possibility to consult with the EC on the draft of this document?*

The EC will request the performance framework methodology document together with the Interreg programme, and there is a possibility to submit its draft for review by the EC before its official submission. This will allow to discuss and fine-tune its contents in advance and thus also foster the process of programme approval. Please note that a mature draft is expected, i.e., at the stage when the programme strategy is agreed, as well as the indicator target values and financial allocations are set.



13. Can a programme choose a limited number of indicators, using the same indicator for several specific objectives (e.g., number of organisations cooperating across borders), especially in cases of programmes with a small financial envelope?

It is up to the programme to decide about the output and result indicators that fit best to the programme strategy. In cases where the programme plans to support soft cooperation activities, the output indicator on 'number of cooperating organisations' can be used, and this can even be done for several specific objectives. It has to be remembered that for each specific objective at least one output and one result indicator need to be defined.

14. Shall all policy objectives have one Interreg-specific and one "thematic" indicator from the ERDF list? Or is it sufficient to use only Interreg-specific ones?

Interreg-specific indicators can be used across all policy objectives, whereas the thematic ERDF common indicators can be mainly used only in relation to the specific policy objectives. Thematic indicators are rather linked to the actions that provide investments, whereas soft activities are better covered by Interreg-specific indicators. On top of these, where necessary, programmes can also add their programme-specific indicators.

15. Can the columns of the Table 2 in the Interreg programme template be changed to have a possibility to reflect the programme's intervention logic in a different way?

The intervention logic for Interreg NEXT programmes is built using the specific objectives as the main building blocks. On the level of the specific objectives the main target groups, as well as the types of actions of the programme are defined. Table 2 of the Interreg programme template requests to define the output and result indicators of the programme for each specific objective, as well as their milestone and target values. In the "specific objective" column the programme will need to select the respective objective that it will contribute to, and the order of the columns in the template cannot be changed.

16. We would like to have the project indicators as a tool for monitoring and self-evaluation. Based only on the common indicators of the programme this is not possible. So, can projects define their specific indicators so that the project progress can be seen based on them?

Managing Authorities may define on their own programme-specific indicators for their programme before adoption. Indicators proposed by and specific to individual projects should not be included in the programme document and consequently should not be included in the formal monitoring and data transmission to the EC. Such gold plating is not encouraged because of the limited value it brings for the programme and to the EC.

If the programme chooses to define additional indicators to be monitored exclusively in the projects this is possible, but these indicators will be monitored solely in their own monitoring system.

- 17. Question about the target value of the result indicator “RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion”: is there any percentage of ‘organisations cooperating in the project within implementation’ which EC considers as optimal for setting the target value of this result indicator?**

The target value of RCR84 was envisaged to be defined as an absolute value, not a relative one; if the Managing Authority decides to calculate the target as a percentage of the correlated output indicator, this explanation in the methodological document of the performance framework. The EC does not have pre-set expectations on optimal values to be attributed to any indicator, result or output. The target setting is an exercise to be undertaken by the Managing Authority having in mind the overall intervention logic proposed by the programme and the direct outputs expected from projects.

- 18. A similar question is about result indicator “RCR 85 Participations in joint actions after project completion”. For setting the target value of this result indicator, is there any optimal percentage of participation in joint actions during the project implementation?**

The target value of RCR85 was envisaged to be defined as an absolute value, not a relative one; if the Managing Authority decides to calculate the target as a percentage of the correlated output indicator, this explanation in the methodological document of the performance framework. The EC does not have pre-set expectations on optimal values to be attributed to any indicator, result or output. The target setting is an exercise to be undertaken by the Managing Authority having in mind the overall intervention logic proposed by the programme and the direct outputs expected from projects.

- 19. Is there any guidance whether the output indicators should be broken down for example by gender (enterprises supported - target 10 (5 female-owned enterprises, 5 male-owned enterprises)?**

The breakdown of indicators into sub categories is only requested, where available, for reporting purposes and not at the level of programming. Based on the draft regulation, no common indicators involve sub categories by gender. The indicators which are to be broken down by sub-categories for the reporting will be clearly indicated in Table 1 of Annex I of ERDF regulation, in its final approved form.

NEXT STEPS

- 20. When will the letters on programme geography be answered? Will they all be answered or only the ones where the EC has remarks?**

In some cases, answers were provided directly by the EC during the Joint Programming Committee or Task Force meetings. In February, the Commission will send letters to the Member States and to the Partner Countries, consulting them of the geographical coverage, building on the answers received from the programmes during these meetings or via the Managing Authorities. The EC will ask to confirm the geography by one month from the receipt of the letter(s).

21. Which is the level of progress of negotiation of the NDICI Regulation? When will the final text be available? Is there any update regarding the negotiations related to it, any new element that might be of interest for the programming process?

The general political agreement was reached on the text of the NDICI Regulation; however, there are still some open elements. The adoption is expected to take place as soon as possible in 2021. As things look now, the levels of pre-financing and co-financing will be fixed in the NDICI Regulation, and the conditions for pre-financing payments will be set in the Interreg Regulation. The level of prefinancing will be up to 80% of the yearly allocation, also for Interreg NEXT transnational programmes (Black Sea Basin, MED, Mid-Atlantic). Moreover, Member States have requested an increase of the budget allocations for cooperation programmes with the neighbourhood Partner Countries, including Interreg NEXT, from 4% to 5% of the overall neighbourhood envelope.

22. Just to confirm, the latest available draft of the Interreg Regulation and of the cooperation template is from 29 May 2019 and, if so, can we expect changes to the template?

The programme template is part of the Interreg Regulation consolidated text as agreed by the end of December. It is now being revised to correspond exactly to the Regulation text as agreed. It could be provided informally to the Managing Authorities when the text is stable.

23. When will the implementing acts be approved?

The idea is to proceed as quickly as possible after the adoption of the regulations, so that the three implementing acts (multiannual strategy document, geography of programmes and budget) are approved by mid-2021. Even if the approval of the regulatory framework is slightly delayed, the EC hopes that the first programmes are submitted shortly after the approval of the implementing acts and adopted before the end of 2021.

24. What are the steps/timeline of the approval of the programmes by the EC (once the regulations are approved)?

The programmes need to be received via SFC. They will be reviewed and undergo internal consultations. The EC will then communicate its opinion to the programme bodies. It is expected though that the contents will be agreed as much as possible along the way, during the consultations and exchanges held in the framework of the Joint Programming Committee meetings, so that the formal part of the approval – after the formal submission – could take as less time as possible.

25. Please indicate the minimum budget for a bilateral CBC programme? Would a total budget of 10 Meur be OK?

As was the case in the past, the budget allocation to each programme will depend on the funds allocated to them by the Member States themselves. The EC hopes that sufficient amounts will be allocated to Interreg NEXT programmes.

26. Which is the technical assistance mechanism for Interreg NEXT programmes? Will flat rate be applied? If yes, how will pre-financing work?

This mechanism is common to all Interreg programmes. Technical assistance will represent up to 10% of the programme budget, but there will be no technical assistance priority as such. The Commission will top up every payment request with a 10% of the amount requested. In practical terms, this flat rate reimbursement will also mean that technical assistance costs will not be checked at all. As for the pre-financing, it is planned that the Commission shall provide it in accordance to the actual financial needs of programmes.

27. Will it be valid for the 2021-27 period as well that the EC allocates the contribution of Partner Countries to the Interreg NEXT programmes? Which will be the rules for calculation (ERDF vs. population)?

The allocation of NDICI and IPA funds to Interreg NEXT programmes will be decided by the EC, in consultation with the European External Action Services (EEAS). The maximum global amount will be set in the respective regulations and the allocation per programme will ensure, for cross-border cooperation programmes that the NDICI at least matches the ERDF funds. As for the transnational Interreg NEXT programmes, the NDICI funding should correspond to the proportion of the Partner Countries in the programme partnership.

28. How precise shall be described the types of actions defined in the Programme document? Can programmes leave some room for flexibility and define/list the 'eligible'/desirable activities on the level of the application pack? This would allow programmes to adjust to what the current information to how things will be in a year, after an updated analysis

When it comes to the types of actions, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The types of actions should be formulated in a way that allows to understand the intervention logic and what the programme intends to finance. Programmes can use the examples mentioned in the Joint Paper and its annexes to find a good balance in defining the expected types of cooperation actions. In technical terms, the template of the cooperation programme allows for 7.000 characters to describe the *“related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate”*. Therefore, the description must be concise.

29. Can a branch office be set up in a Member State?

Branch offices, as understood under article 46.2 of draft Interreg Regulation, can be set up in a Partner Country. Even though the article does not mention the possibility of setting up branch offices in Member States it is also not forbidden, the recital 27 of the Regulation mentions the need of *“contact points (antennae) in Interreg programmes, due to the participation of more than one Member State”*. Therefore, it could be decided at programme level to establish the regional point(s) of contact in Member States also.