

Alpine Space programme

**Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness:
application and selection procedures**
Evaluation report – Final draft

14 | 20

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Purpose of the evaluation

The Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme is half-way into its implementation and aims at understanding in how far its management settings are supporting the achievement of its goals. This evaluation ought to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of programme procedures, and whether they are fit for supporting the preparation, submission and selection of projects¹. It looks at the services offered to applicants, at the functions and interplay of programme bodies, and at their capacity to address the needs of applicants and select projects meeting high qualitative standards. It aims at identifying areas of improvement or good practices in view of bettering the programme management and implementation in this 2014-2020 period. Findings from this evaluation are also meant to inform the design of a future Alpine Space programme post 2020.

An as wide as possible range of stakeholders has been involved in the preparation and development of this evaluation:

- steering group on evaluation (ESG)², that contributed to the design of this evaluation and reviewed this evaluation report;
- project applicants from both approved and rejected projects, that offered their perspective as end users and their proposals for improvement;
- national coordinators, national contact points (ACP) and staff members of the managing authority and joint secretariat (MA and JS), who expressed their opinions in interviews;
- external evaluation experts, who provided guidance, input and independent review.

Gathering the expertise and hearing the opinion of these stakeholders was key to the programme in view of improving its management, both in the short and long term.

¹ The objectives and cornerstones of this evaluation were set in the programme evaluation plan, approved by the programme committee (PC) on 15-16 December 2015. Its content and methodology were then further detailed in an evaluation concept designed by the joint secretariat and the managing authority (JS and MA) with the support and review of external experts, and in coordination with the steering group on evaluation (ESG). The concept was approved by the PC on 29 November 2016. This evaluation focuses on application and selection procedures.

² The ESG has been established in the year 2016. It has been set up with the objective of steering the overall programme evaluation and supporting the implementation of the evaluation plan. Its tasks range from providing input for the development of evaluation questions, to contributing to the definition of terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts and to analysing the outcomes of evaluations (reports). The ESG is meant to represent the programme stakeholders and allow their participation in the implementation of the evaluation plan. It is composed of members of the PC, MA, JS and a national expert on evaluation (from the Italian national level) and also the EC is invited to join the group. Based on the partnership principle as stipulated in the EU code of conduct for ESI funds, the participation of programme stakeholders (e.g. from economic sector, civil society, etc.) to the ESG was encouraged (nominations from the Partner States). Coordination with the PC is ensured by the PC Chair and MA/JS.



Features of the evaluation

Evaluation questions

The aspects to be appraised and the relevant evaluation questions were set in the Alpine Space evaluation plan and the relevant evaluation concept. They tackle four main aspects:

- Support to applicants
- Application process
- Selection procedure
- Functioning and coordination of programme bodies

The evaluation questions are the following:

Aspects	Evaluation questions
Support to applicants	1. How well are programme bodies (ACP and JS) supporting (potential) applicants in project generation?
Application process	2. How effective are application procedures? How well are application procedures targeting the programme objectives and envisaged results? In particular for the 2-step application process: how efficient is it for applicants and programme bodies; in how far is it supporting high quality projects to be submitted to the programme? Are there areas for improvement?
Selection procedure	3. In how far are the project assessment criteria and procedures as well as selection process sound, transparent and fair, aiming at high quality projects to be funded? 4. How well is the programme explaining to applicants the results of project evaluation and selection (be it approval or rejection) and supporting them for further improvement (in case of resubmission)?
Functioning and coordination of programme bodies	5. In how far are decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent? 6. How are the interactions between the programme bodies organised? 7. Are their functions and responsibilities clearly established? 8. How effective is the coordination among these bodies? 9. How effective is the coordination with other Interreg programmes and EUSALP? 10. In which cases a better coordination is necessary?



Methodology

This evaluation was conducted by a team of JS/MA staff members and external, independent evaluation experts. The JS ensured the overall coordination of work, performed the collection and analysis of the necessary information, with the MA's contribution. Activities where the need for functional separation was higher, such as interviews and moderation of focus groups, were conducted directly by the external experts who have also proofed the evaluation concept, the analysis carried out by the JS and have finally formulated recommendations.

Data sources for this evaluation include:

- administrative data and desk research
- a web survey to applicants
- focus group with beneficiaries (lead partners and partners)
- interviews to national coordinators, with the presence of ACP where possible, as wells as to MA and JS staff members
- outcomes of previous evaluations of the Alpine Space programme.

This enabled to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. Administrative data cover the features of applicants and projects, the rates of success as well as information on call management (e.g. timing for project approval). Qualitative data state the different kinds of supports provided to applicants during project development and submission, the features of the programme's application and selection procedures, as well as the repartition of functions between programme bodies in the selection procedure.

Administrative data collection and desk research

The administrative data collection and analysis cover the programme periods 2014-2020 and, based on data availability, 2007-2013 with regard to the management of call for proposals. The main sources used were the programme records and data from the electronic monitoring system (eMS). Data for the period 2014-2020 focuses on the two calls for proposals which have been launched and completed so far. A third call is still undergoing and therefore complete data sets are not available, yet. This is the reason why it has been mostly excluded from this analysis. In addition, a focus has been put on the first two calls of both programme periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 as this reflects a similar status in the programme implementation and allows benchmarking comparable data.

The desk research has consisted of the review of programme documents (e.g. cooperation programme, project implementation handbook, etc.), previous evaluations run for the programme (see section below),



and benchmarks to other programmes. The benchmark had the objective of identifying possible areas of improvement of the Alpine Space as opposed to other programmes, and look at good practices the latter may offer. To this end, Interreg programmes have been used as a benchmark on a number of elements. The three Interreg programmes selected for this purpose are 2 transnational and 1 interregional programmes having a partially overlapping geographical area with the Alpine Space, being co-financed by ERDF and applying a mix of one-step and two-step application procedures: Interreg Central Europe, Interreg Europe and Interreg North West Europe. As no benchmark study exists on Interreg programmes yet, a comparison has been made mainly through review of programme documents such as programme manuals, applications manuals, factsheets and the programme websites. Finally, findings have been analysed from the recent study on “Gold-Plating, in the European structural and investment funds” commissioned by the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development (REGI Committee), in view of establishing in how far the Alpine Space programme has managed simplifying procedures and keeping low administrative burden for beneficiaries in the application phase.

Involvement of stakeholders

As stated in the evaluation plan, the programme promoted the involvement of its stakeholders in carrying out the evaluation, through different forms of consultation and exchanges. Among contributors to the evaluation activities were applicants (of both rejected and approved projects), beneficiaries as well as programme body members. Through a web survey, a focus group and interviews, they provided a qualitative assessment of the programme procedures.

Survey to applicants

The survey was developed by the JS in consultation with the MA and with the support of external experts. It focused on applicants’ satisfaction regarding the support received during the application process as well as on their perception on the transparency and fairness of the selection procedure. Besides, the survey was also an opportunity to gather their suggestions for improvements of the procedures and support services offered by the programme. Its scope was limited to call 2 and did not include call 1 due to the very different settings of the two calls which would have led to consequent difficult interpretation of outcomes: e.g. different format of the expression of interest, radical shift towards ACP as the programme body dedicated to project generation (rather than ACP/JS). The survey was strictly confidential and no personal details were requested to participate. This was done in view of encouraging free and open feedback from respondents. The survey was addressed to all applicants from call 2, and not only the lead applicants but also those organisations participating in the project proposal as project partners; it also involved applicants from rejected and



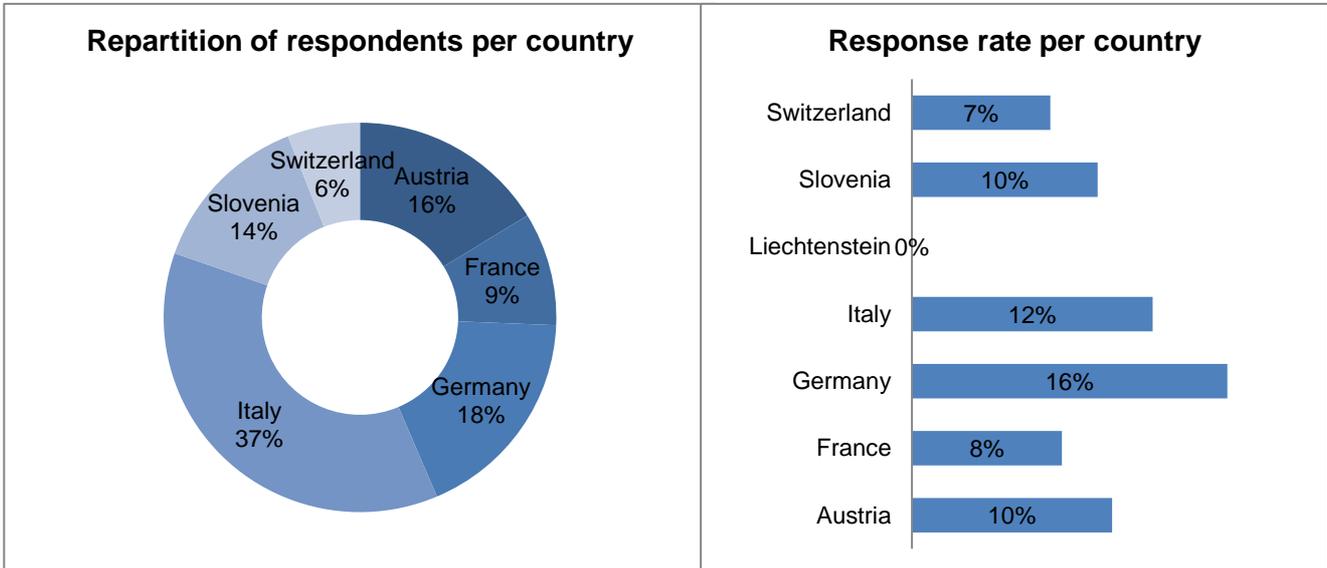
approved proposals in both steps of the call. The target group of the survey was therefore quite varied, with good potential to represent different experiences made in project development and the application phase. However, this also represented a challenge in terms of response rate. The survey was taken by 117 respondents, representing 11% of the total number of applicants invited. Although relatively low, such a response rate still allows drawing meaningful conclusions.

The underlying reasons for such a response rate could be manifold:

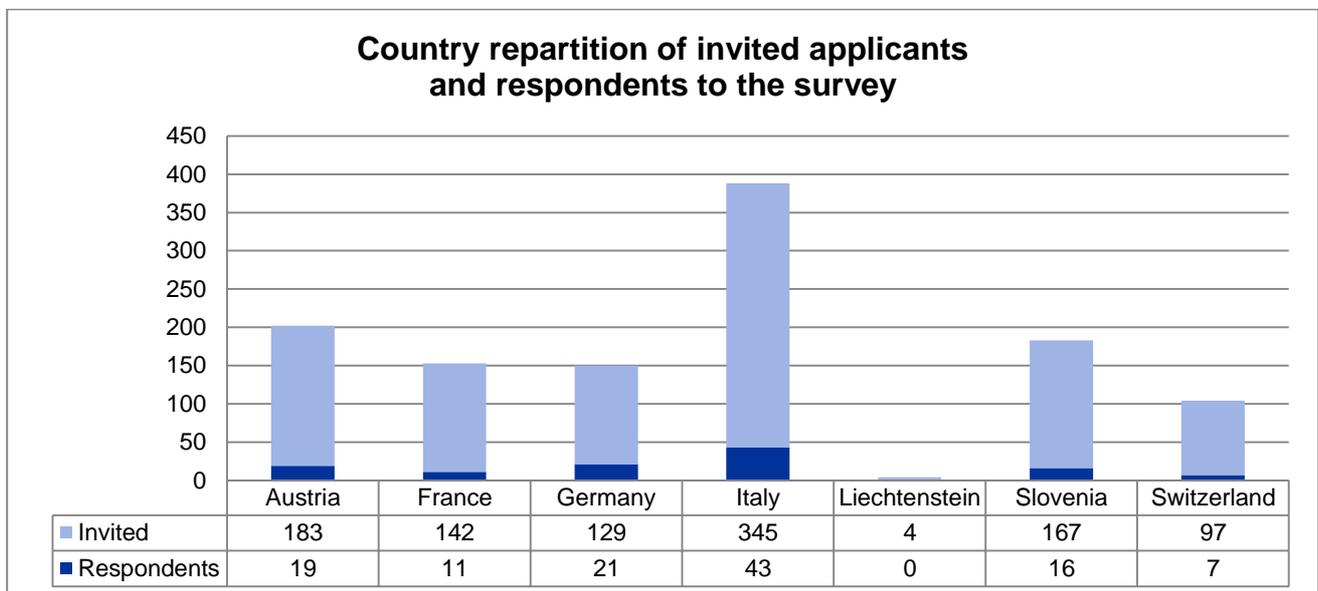
- Target of the survey: as mentioned above, also the unsuccessful applicants have been surveyed (which outstand in number the beneficiaries). They may have been relatively less interested in participating to the survey. Similarly, the survey was addressed to both lead applicants and applicants. Whereas higher in number, some of the applicants may have been less in contact with programme bodies and may have participated to a minor extent to the application phase, as opposed to lead applicants. This may have affected their interest in taking the survey.
- Timing: the survey covered both step 1 and 2 of the application procedure. For applicants in step 1, this meant a time gap of one year from when they made their experience with the programme application and when they have been invited to the survey.
- Competition: several programmes have been performing evaluation activities and thus soliciting stakeholders to provide feedback.
- Dissemination: the survey was announced via email and not sufficiently promoted through e.g. newsletters, ACP network, specific letters, etc.

These factors may explain to some extent the registered response rate. They also represent a lesson learnt which will be taken into account when implementing similar evaluation activities in the future, with the objective of increasing the response rate and the involvement of stakeholders.

Looking more in detail at the features of respondents, response rate varies across countries, role in the project and experience with EU funds as well as type of organisation. With the highest number of call 2 applicants, Italy also represents the highest proportion of overall respondents to the survey: 37% of total (but 12% of the Italian applicants invited to the survey).



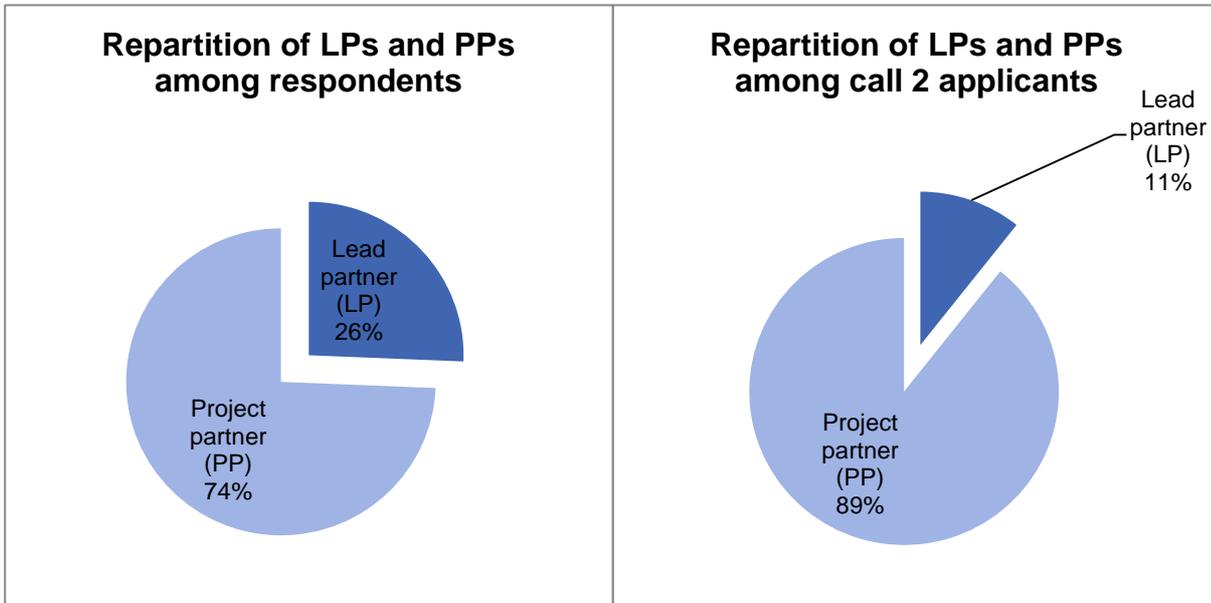
When comparing the number of respondents against the number of invited in each country, Germany registers the most significant participation: 16% of the invited German applicants. Instead, none of the 4 applicants invited for Liechtenstein submitted a response.



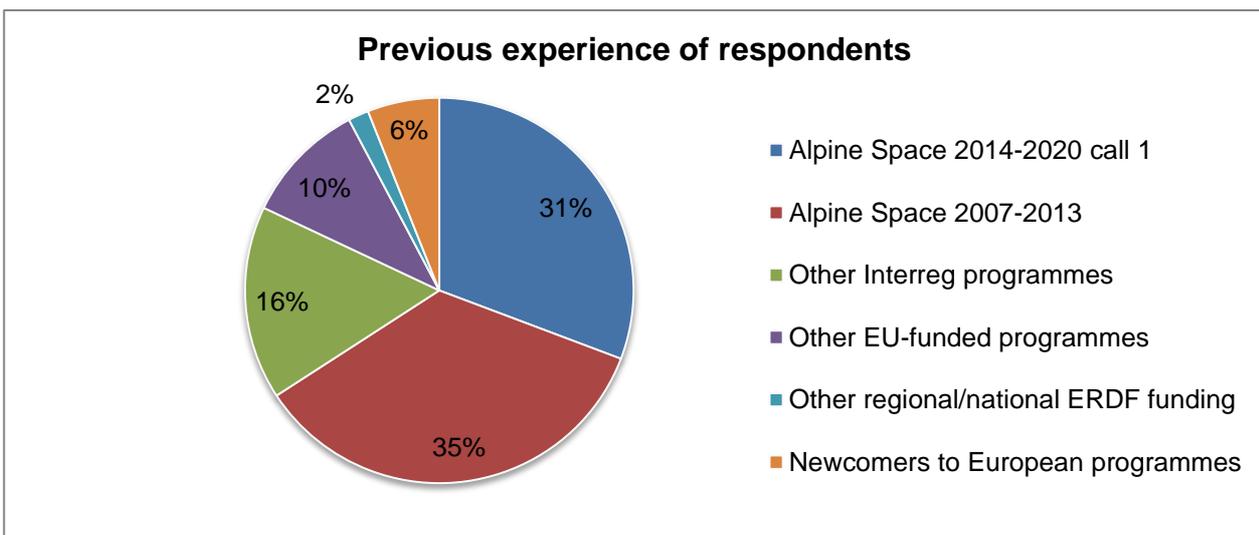
A higher response rate (58%) was observed for applicants whose project proposal was invited to the 2nd step, as opposed to those rejected at the 1st step of the application procedure (42%). The former were keener to take part in the survey, despite representing only 20% of the overall number of project proposals.



Similarly, lead partners represent 26% of respondents, whereas they account for about 11% only of the total number of project partners for call 2.

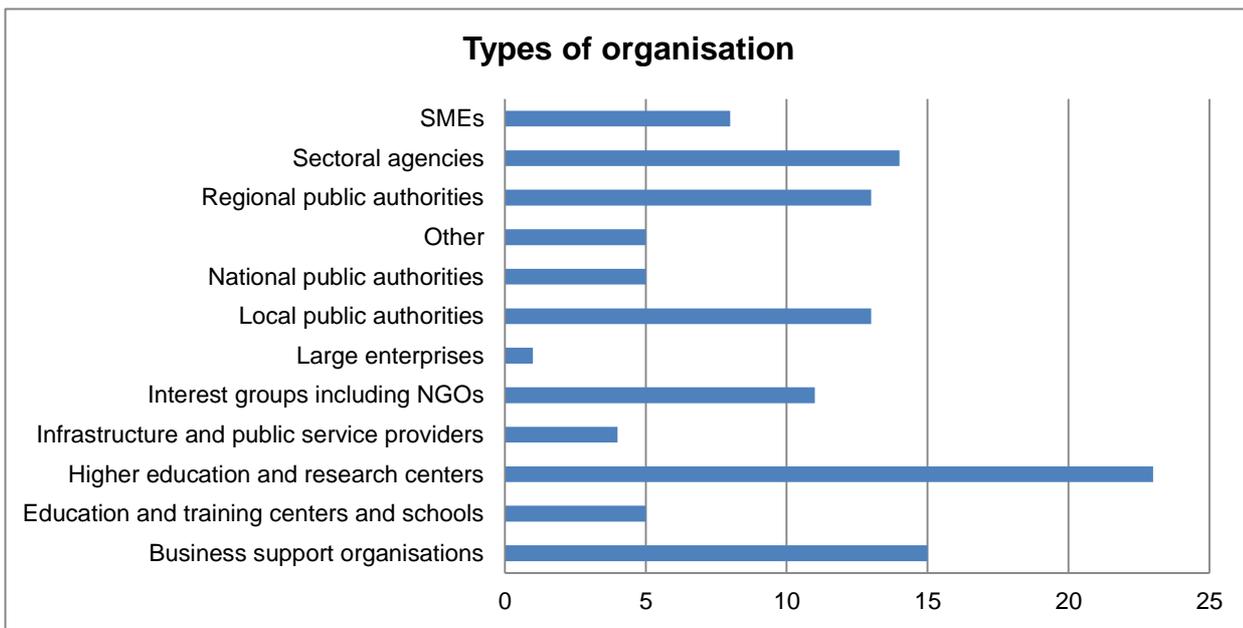


Most of the respondents already had experience with the Alpine Space programme, having previously applied in the first 2014-2020 call for proposals (31%) or in the 2007-2013 programming period (35%). As much as 28% of respondents had already applied to other Interreg or EU-funded programmes or to regional/national ERDF funding. Only 6% of the respondents were complete newcomers to European programmes before applying to the 2nd Alpine Space call for proposals.





The types of organisation responding to the survey are also quite diverse, although mainly higher education and research centres, regional and local public authorities. A number of SMEs and interest groups including NGOs also took part in the survey.



This allowed gathering the point of view of organisations with different administrative cultures (e.g. private versus public), diverse level of experience and expectations towards the programme.

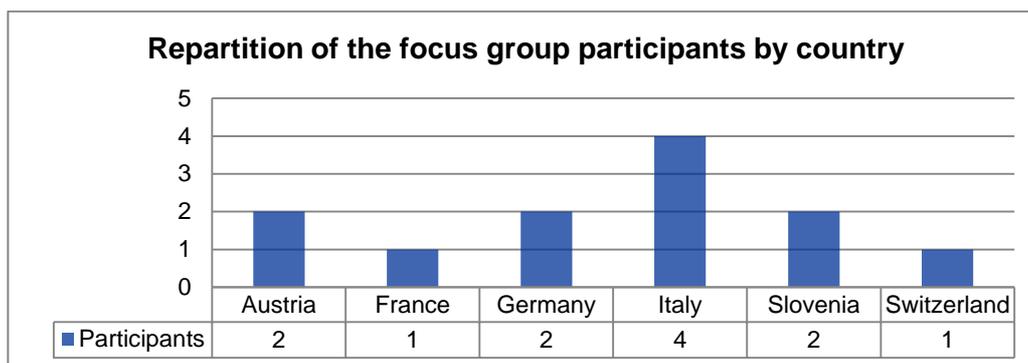
The outcomes of this survey were compared with those in the period 2007-2013, which was addressed to financed projects (after closure).

Focus group

The focus group with beneficiaries had the objectives of deepening the outcomes of the survey and establishing a more dynamic exchange of information. It was addressed to a limited number of lead partners and a few partners from approved projects, in order to gather qualitative feedback and allow for an effective discussion. Invitation was based on a combination of the following criteria: known experience in the management of Alpine Space projects from the periods 2007-2013 and/or 2014-2020; newcomers; known experience in the management of other EU programmes (e.g. Interreg and Horizon 2020); balanced geographical representation; role of lead partner as they are the ones dealing the most with programme bodies and procedures; project partners to receive insights into their perspective. Whereas organised by the JS, the focus group was fully moderated by external evaluation experts. Participants were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as to formulate suggestions for improvements.



Out of the 12 beneficiaries taking part in the focus group, 10 were lead partners and 2 project partners. The majority had applied to the second call, 3 participants were call 1 or both calls. Finally, the geographical representation of the programme was overall respected, with the following repartition per countries:



Interviews with programme bodies

Interviews were developed and run entirely by the external evaluation experts. A total of 6 interviews have been run with the national coordinators of the programme, and the presence of ACP was encouraged. Two interviews were addressed to staff members of the managing authority as well as of the joint secretariat. Interviews focused on the role and coordination of programme bodies, support to applicants, transparency and programme procedures.

Outcomes of previous evaluations

For the purposes of this evaluation, three previous appraisals of programme management procedures become relevant:

- mid-term evaluation, in the period 2000-2006³
- self-assessment on improving project quality (quality process), in the period 2007-2013
- ex-ante evaluation, in the period 2014-2020

Most relevant findings are summarised below.

³ The 2000-2006 mid-term evaluation provided a picture of the programme implementation after 1 completed call for proposals. Therefore, it is neither representative of the whole programme period, nor does it allow a full comparison with the current evaluation which instead focuses on the 2 calls completed so far (call 3 being still open).



Mid-term
(00-06)

- Time consuming processes of calls for and assessment of projects.
- Some 40 assessment criteria/sub-criteria for the evaluation of project proposals. Need for and usefulness of as many criteria questionable. Risk that the great number of criteria leads to a somewhat mechanical selection procedure.
- Demanding requirements concerning mutual coordination (of programme bodies).

Quality
process
(07-13)

Measures identified to improve project quality:

- Clear and understandable terms of reference for the calls for project proposals
- Improvement of the final synthesis of the project assessment done by the JS, which should present the identified strengths and weaknesses of the project
- Intensified assistance and guidance to projects between step 1 and 2 of the application procedure:
 - More precise and elaborated guidance by the task force in the “invitation letter” to step 2
 - Presentation to and discussion of the guidance at the applicants seminar
 - Offer of project management trainings as part of the lead partner seminars, in order to complete guidance on programme requirements and procedures with soft skills on “how to” implement a project.

Ex-ante
(14-20)

- Stronger orientation towards results requires adequate administrative capacity and human resources not only for delivering day-to-day management control but also for assuring smooth implementation and efficient decision making process. The typologies of indicators selected for the programme will probably produce an increase of time and resources devoted by the programme bodies to the monitoring and evaluation activities.



- The MA and JS expect that the resources for delivering these new tasks shall come from the reduction of time allowed by the adoption of a computerised system (e-MS) for exchanging data. The system will allow reducing not only the time and the human resources by programme bodies but also the administrative burden for beneficiaries.
- Need for detailed guidance to applicants/beneficiaries on the use of project indicators and reinforced monitoring of data provided by beneficiaries on output indicators.
- Need for intensified services for the project holders with regard to project development and increased demands for outputs and results. For this reason, the JS will reinforce its role of coordination of the national contact points as well as to take charge of some specific activities for directly informing and supporting beneficiaries.

These findings have been taken into consideration in the following analysis on the efficiency and effectiveness of programme procedures of the new Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme.

State of play of the programme implementation

The programme is half-way in its implementation period and has so far launched three calls for proposals, including an invitation for a EUSALP project. Whereas call 3 is still open, the other calls have been fully managed and closed, resulting in the approval of 33 projects and the commitment of 55% of the programme budget. All calls registered a high interest and a significant increase in the number of applications, compared to the 2007-2013 period. As many as 445 applications for funding have been received in these three calls of the 2014-2020 period against only 412 for the entire 2007-2013 period and its five calls for proposals. This represents an increase by 8% so far, which goes up to 65% when comparing a similar timeframe (i.e. the first two calls in both programme periods). Such an increase demonstrates the attractiveness of the programme. Because the programme budget for the co-financing of projects increased by only 7% across the two funding periods⁴, this also means that demand for funding exceeded by far the supply, thus leading to higher competition among applicants and a lower success rate than in the past.

⁴ This includes both the ERDF allocation and national match funding, net of the technical assistance budget.



Analysis of efficiency and effectiveness

The outcomes and findings of the evaluation activities carried out are presented here along the evaluation questions set out in the programme evaluation plan and the relevant evaluation concept.

Support to applicants

Key findings

- The Alpine Space programme offers a combination of support services for applicants at the stage of project development. These services are tailored to different needs and levels of knowledge of the programme (including for new comers).
- This support is generally considered effective by applicants and satisfaction has increased compared with the 2007-2013 period. The assistance provided by the JS is strongly appreciated, especially under step 2 of the application process. The satisfaction on ACP support varies from country to country, due to an unequal availability and lack of uniform messages provided to applicants.
- The support from ACPs is most useful as regards project generation in step 1, whereas the JS is most useful in providing assistance in step 2.
- The project idea and partner search tools are meant specifically for newcomers. As such, these tools are less used by the majority of (other) applicants. However these tools also suffer from potential inadequacy to the needs of applicants, who are reluctant to publish on web-based tools details about their project fearing competition.
- Direct feedback and individual consultations are considered by beneficiaries as the most useful support services in improving the project proposals.
- Programme events are well-attended and appreciated. Match-making events should be provided on a larger scale to support newcomers in partners' search.
- The programme website offers a good repository of documents for applicants but its organisation could be reviewed and additional functions added so as to ease its use.
- Overall, the programme documents are largely used by applicants, with the exception of the eMS guidance being under-used. Programme documents provide relevant and useful information for the development of project proposals. However, language could be simplified, style be less prescriptive and focus more on the "how to" develop and implement projects. Overlaps across factsheets could also be avoided.
- The use of e-tools (e.g. tutorials, webinars, etc.) could be further explored.



Alpine Space services

The programme puts efforts in supporting applicants when developing their project proposals. It proposes quite a wide range of services, tailored to the need of applicants at the different phases of project development, application and start. They are also differentiated based on the level of knowledge and experience applicants have with the programme, including newcomers. They are aimed not only to reduce the burden for applicants in shaping their proposal but also to support the quality of such proposals.

First level information

Information on the programme rationale and guidance on how to set up a transnational Alpine Space project are collected in a project implementation handbook and made available on the programme website. This includes a factsheet dedicated to project quality, where the features of a “good” project and the expectations of the programme in terms of quality are outlined.

Information days and other similar events are organised at national level by ACPs to ensure an adequate level of information on the opening of calls for proposals, the themes covered in terms of reference, project features and conditions for participation, including national requirements. Such events are organised at local/regional level with the aim of reaching the programme stakeholders in the territories eligible to the programme. The JS takes part in these events by providing guidance on aspects related to the programme’s and projects’ intervention logic, on quality expectations and sustainability of results.

At transnational level, the programme organises networking or match-making events for the different stakeholders or potential applicants to meet and foster synergies. Besides, these events are intended to provide newcomers with a good opportunity to gain visibility and establish networks.

Services for project development

This is one of the phases where a greater combination of services is offered to applicants. Online project community and partner search tools are made available to assist applicants in the development of their projects in step 1. These tools are meant especially for newcomers and less experienced applicants with the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme. The project idea community enables registered users to share their project idea with others, find potential project partners, and/or get a non-binding feedback on their project idea. Submitting a project idea on the project community enables potential applicants to request support from the ACPs. During the first step of the application procedure, the ACPs provide a non-binding feedback on the relevance of project ideas for the programme as well as first guidance for its development into a project proposal.



Personal consultations (face-to-face, phone or skype meetings) between the applicants and the ACP are normally offered during a call for proposals. These represent a more advanced level of support in project development (although no feedback is provided on prefilled EoI or AF before their submission and assessment). Personal consultations may be organised at the occasion of infodays or other events. Upon request, ACP also offer support in the search of adequate partners or regarding the fulfilment of national requirements for application.

Support to application

Based on the findings of previous evaluations, the programme has intensified assistance and guidance to projects between step 1 and 2 of the application procedure⁵. Between the two steps, all lead applicants of selected project proposals are invited to attend a lead applicant seminar, which provides them with guidance and training on how to structure the project, how to develop the application form, how to deal with formal requirements connected to the partnership agreement. More and more attention has been dedicated in guiding beneficiaries on quality aspects of proposals, how to develop the project intervention logic and use output indicators. Professionally-led project management trainings are offered, dealing with aspects such as stakeholders and risk analysis and more generally strengthening the soft skills on “how to” design a successful project. Individual consultations between the JS and lead applicants are also organised, either face-to-face meetings or via telephone conference. Consultations with the JS are restricted to a unique meeting, whose objective is addressing the outcomes of the evaluation of proposals, its weaknesses and need for improvement for the 2nd step of application – with a specific focus on result orientation as well as on the recommendations formulated by the PC.

Support for project start

The services offered by the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme continues after the selection phase, since the programmes bodies also provide support for the project start. Thematic seminars or workshops are organised at the intention of lead partners, project managers or communication teams.

JS staff members also attend the projects kick-off meetings, in order to establish a direct connection with all the project partners (not only the lead partner) and provide them with assistance for a smooth project start and implementation.

The stakeholders' perception

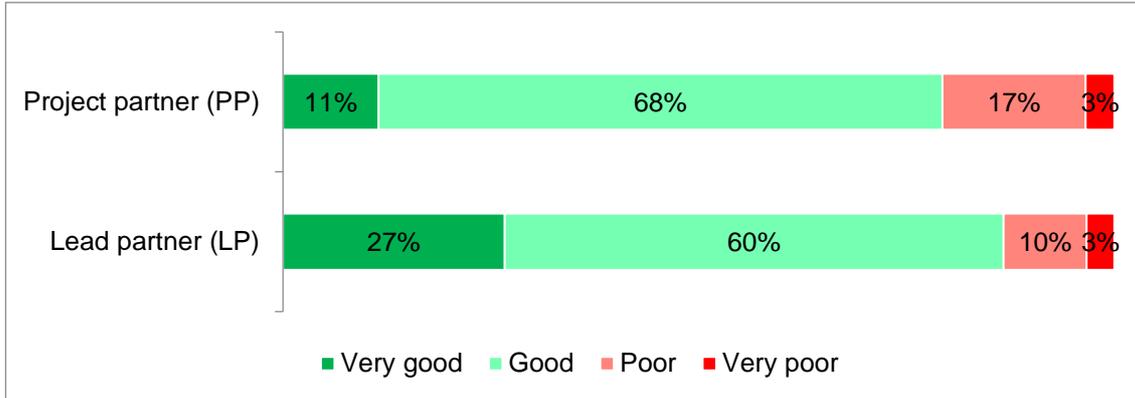
The overall support provided by the programme during the application procedure is generally appreciated: 81% of respondents to the survey rate it “good” to “very good”, with a higher proportion of lead

⁵ See above reference to the Quality process 2007-2013 and the ex-ante evaluation 2014-2020.



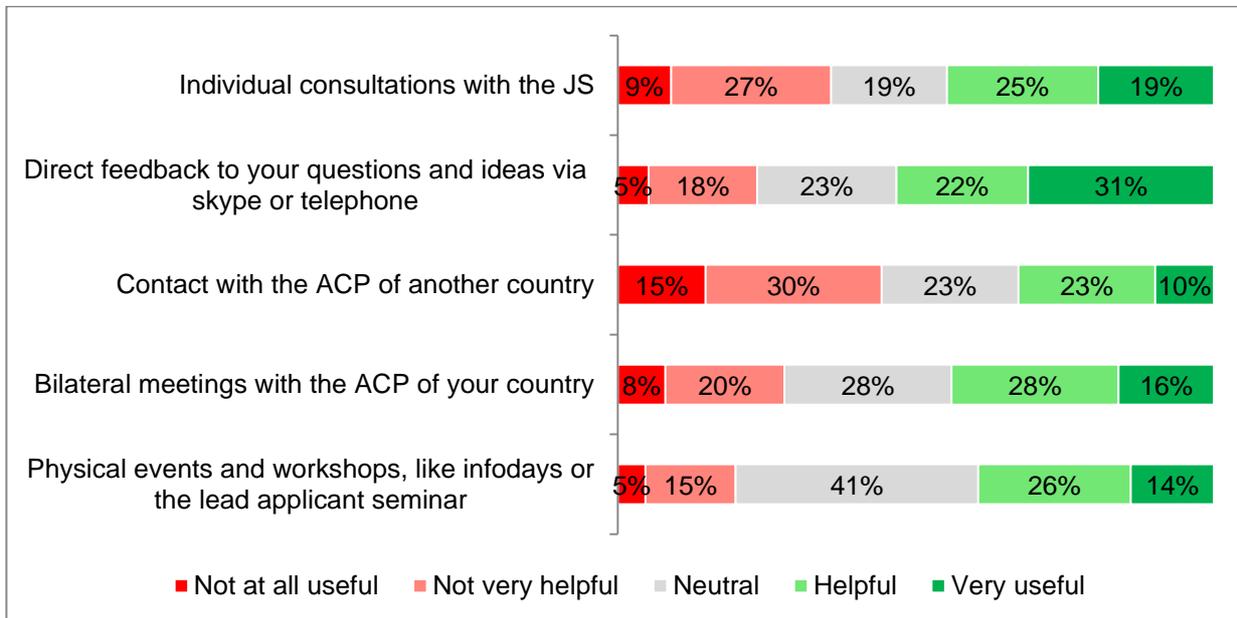
applicants being satisfied (at 87% against 79% of project partners).

- Applicants survey - Question: How would you rate the overall support provided by the Alpine Space programme in the application procedure?



According to the survey, most used types of support are the direct feedback by skype or telephone (53% of respondents) and bilateral meetings with the ACPs and JS (44%).

- Applicants survey - Question: When developing your project proposal, which of the following was in your view most useful?

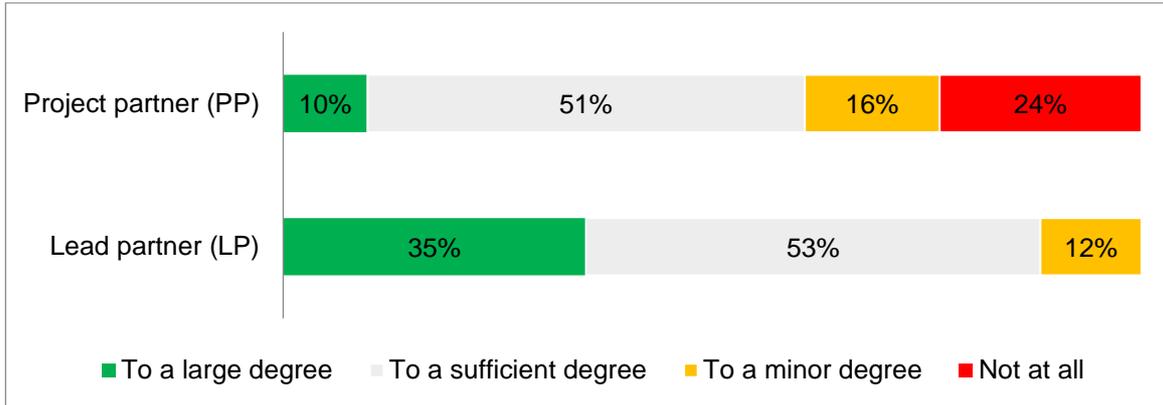


The assistance provided by the JS is strongly appreciated, especially under step 2 of the application process. A large majority of lead applicants (88%) declare that the individual consultation with the JS improved their project proposal in view of the AF submission (step 2). They declare having improved their



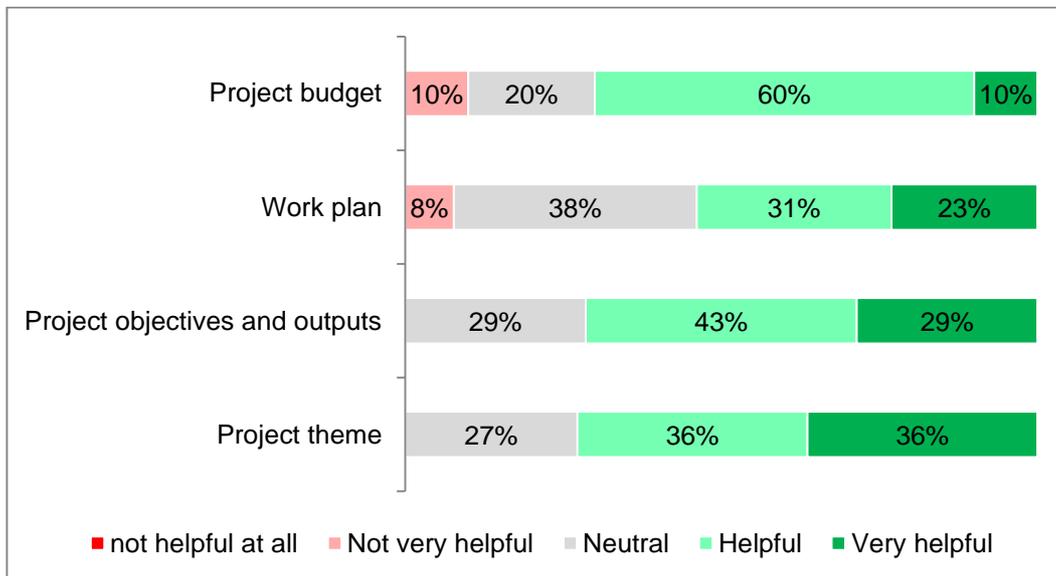
proposal to a “sufficient” (53%) or even “large degree” (35%). Despite the individual consultations being addressed to lead applicants only, also respondents with a role of project partner consider this support positively for the further development of their project (63%).

▪ Applicants survey - Question: In how far did the individual consultation with the JS improve your project proposal in step 2?



In step 2, the JS assistance is relevant in all aspects of developing the AF and particularly for the project theme, its objectives and outputs as well as the budget. For these elements, applicants express a satisfaction of 70% or higher.

▪ Applicants survey - Question: In step 2 [...], what was the support provided by the JS most helpful for?

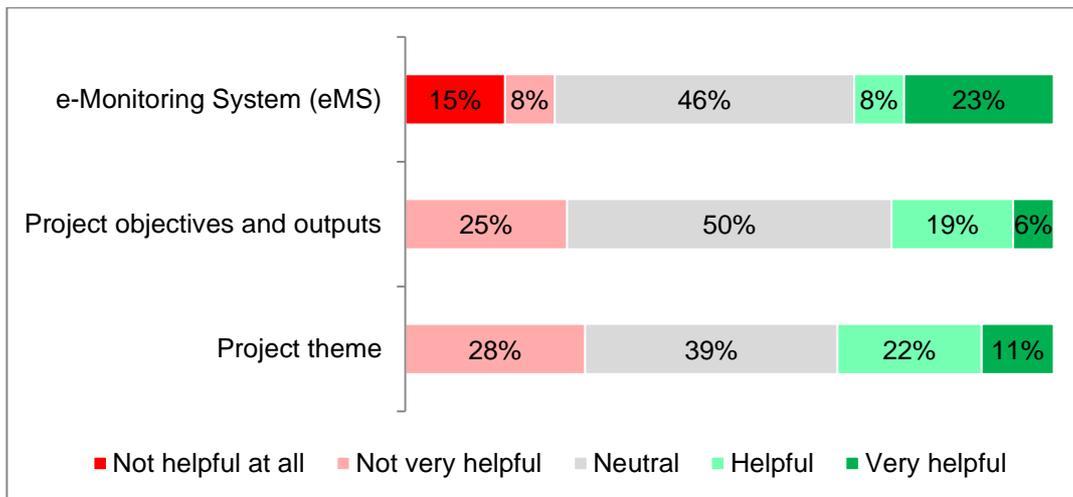


Starting from the 2nd call a shift was operated by programme bodies in the provision of project development support in step 1, which was allocated to the ACP rather than a joint responsibility of the ACP-JS. Nonetheless, 67% of lead applicants declare having contacted the JS for support in step 1 whereas the great



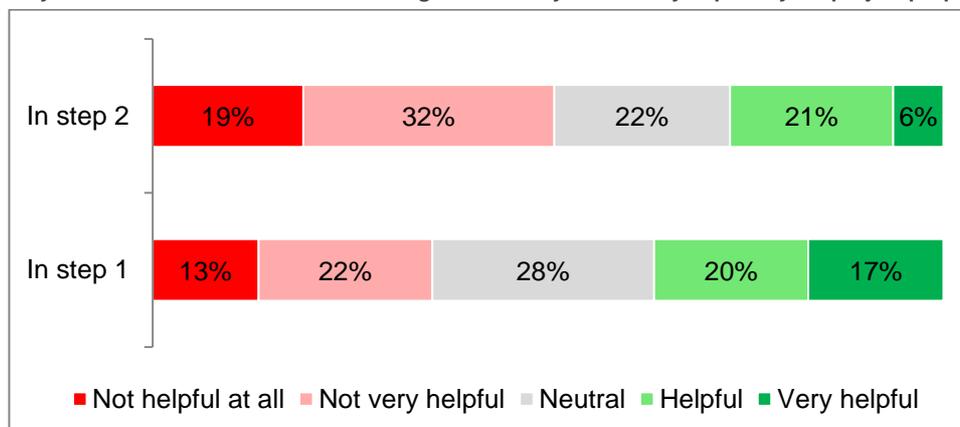
majority (75%) of applicants with a role of project partner did not. In general the support role played by the JS during project generation is limited, with only one third of the lead applicants declaring it to be useful for clarifications on the project theme or support with the eMS application. Quite as many, consider the support of the JS in step 1 as “not very helpful”, including a 15% of lead applicant stating that this was “not at all helpful” with regard to the eMS.

▪ Applicants survey - Question: In step 1, what was the support provided by the JS most helpful for?



The support from ACPs is also appreciated but with diverging opinions from country to country. Respondents having contacted the ACP of their own country consider its support to be more effective in step 1 than in step 2. While 37% of respondents find their ACP support useful to very useful in the 1st step, they are 27% to share this opinion for the 2nd step. A short majority (51%) actually declares that the support from their ACP in step 2 was not or not at all helpful in improving their project proposal.

▪ Applicants survey - Question: In how far did contacting the ACP of your country improve your project proposal?

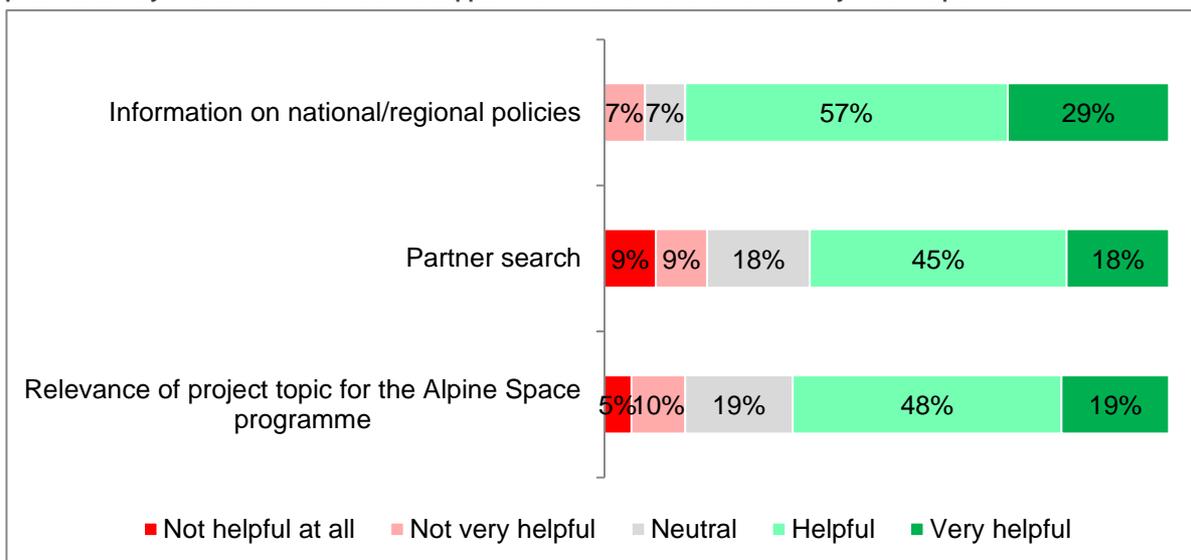




However, when looking at specific topics, the support from ACPs is more positively rated. It is in particular helpful for clarifying issues related to national requirements (64% of respondents), providing information on national/regional policies (52%) and feedback on the relevance of the project topic for the programme (51%).

On the contrary, respondents rate the helpfulness of their ACP in the partner search as very limited. They are only 27% to declare themselves satisfied, while 51% finds the support on this topic insufficient. Indeed lead or project partners most probably already dispose of an existing network and/or of a good knowledge of potential partners in their own country. This finding is reinforced by the fact that, by comparison, the support provided by ACPs from other countries appears more helpful for the partner search, with 63% of respondents rating it helpful to very helpful. Contacting ACPs from other countries is also deemed relevant for information on national/regional policies (86%) as well as on the relevance of the project topic (67%). About a third (29%) of respondents declares having contacted at least one ACP from another country during the development of their project proposal. This share amounts to 50% among the lead applicants.

▪ Applicants survey - Question: What was the support from the ACP of another country most helpful for?



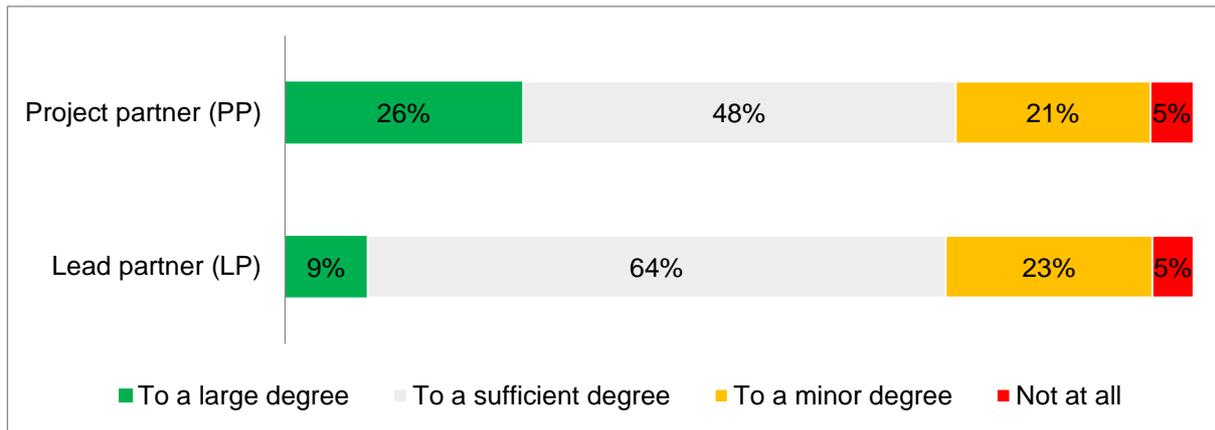
The opinions on ACP support diverge from one country to another. While some considered that this support could be reinforced (in particular the Italian ones), others praised the support from the ACPs (especially the French and Swiss one). Applicants in particular regret the unequal availability of ACPs, the limited technical support they provide as well as the lack of harmonised or uniform messages delivered to lead applicants.

The events organised by the programme bodies in the generation and application phases are well attended and appreciated by applicants. 55% of respondents to the survey attended the national infodays, with an even higher participation of lead applicants (73%). A majority of respondents deems these presentation



events sufficiently to very useful for the preparation of their project proposal. Attendance seems even more relevant for project partners (26% declares participation was “to a large degree” useful).

- Applicants survey - Question: How useful was participating to the national infoday useful for the preparation of your project proposal?



Lead applicant seminars are also considered an extremely effective form of support between the 2 steps of the application procedure. All lead applicant respondents declare to have attended it, and found it useful to a sufficient (76%) or even large degree (24%) in improving their project proposal in view of submitting the application form.

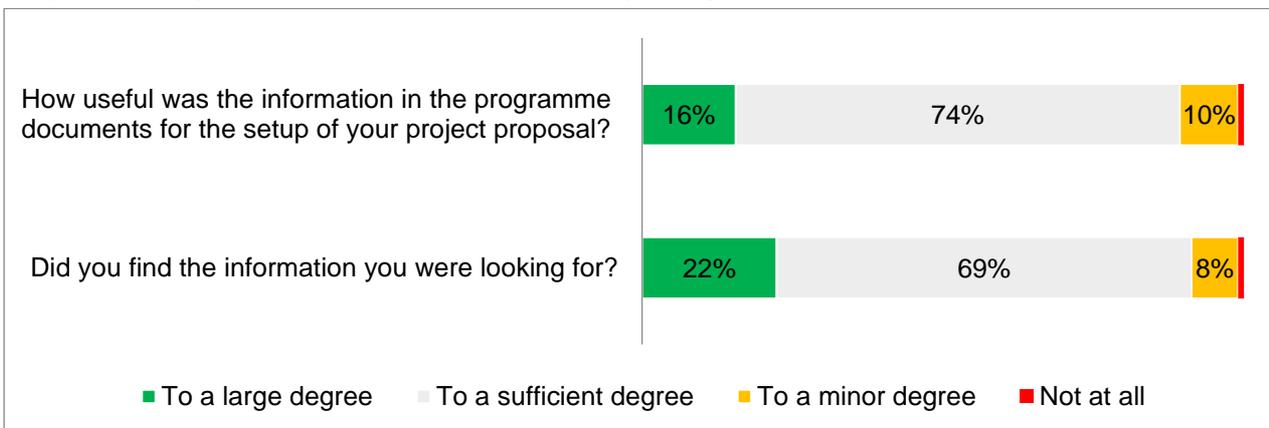
Besides, networking events like the Meet & Match forum organised by the programme bodies on 21-22 March 2017 are solicited by lead/project partners, who deem such events essential tools in fostering exchanges between applicants and granting more visibility to newcomers. In this regard, focus group participants underlined that newcomers faced difficulties in being visible to programme bodies as well as to potential partners. They also encouraged the organisation of workshops featuring high quality ideas of projects to help applicants in understanding the programme’s expectations.

The programme website is considered “accessible”, with a majority of respondents declaring the documents to be easy to very easy to find. However, it came out of the focus group that the website is not very intuitive and its organisation should be reviewed in order to improve the accessibility of documents. As improvements for the download function, applicants suggested to create a search function on the website, as well as to make clearer which documents are behind the download buttons (e.g. through featuring the date and version in the document title). It was also asked for a more systematic notification upon update of a factsheet on the website. Many applicants seemed unaware of the possibility to download the full project implementation handbook (PIH) as a unique document. It was also suggested to precise the table of content of this document with an indication of the pages.



Nonetheless, the available programme documents are largely used: 88% of respondents used them in the preparation of their project proposal. The most used documents in this phase are the guidance on EoI/AF (78% of applicants used it) as well as the factsheets (68%). Only 46% of respondents used the eMS guidance. It was however observed during the focus group that the eMS is more efficient than systems used by other programmes. The factsheets on project generation are considered complete but partly overlapping. From their experience in other Interreg programmes, participants to the focus group find the Alpine Space information and support documents most effective. For a majority of respondents, the programme documents provide relevant information (91%) and are useful for the setup of a project proposal (90%). Some participants to the focus group generally regret the complexity of the vocabulary of result orientation logic, which they deem difficult to understand. Result orientation and the concept of the intervention logic are also viewed by the JS interviewees as a challenge for applicants; these aspects still require a learning curve (e.g. differences between outputs and results) and further, specific support from both the ACP and JS. Despite its complexity the programme intervention logic has enabled to ensure better alignment of projects to the programme, in their view.

▪ Applicants survey - Questions: Usefulness and accessibility of programme documents



The project idea community is used by a limited part of respondents: 25% declared having used the project idea tool and 16% the partner search tool. The tool is mainly used to look for a project idea or to find out if a similar project idea was already posted; only 24% project idea tool users used it to post a project idea, i.e. 6% of respondents to the survey. However the project idea tool and the partner search tool were found of minor to no use in the preparation of their project proposal by respectively 48% and 68% of users, which may also be due to the lack of utilisation of the tool by applicants. Apart from the lack of awareness and in some cases of time to use the tool, the main reason for its under-utilisation is that in most cases, the project idea is already well developed and the partnership established. As it was suggested in the focus group, the



partner search tool in particular may be inadequate to the characteristics of Alpine Space projects. Lead applicants rely on their own national or European network or that of their partners, including through taking partners from previous or other projects. Also, there is reluctance in publishing elements of the project proposal on a web-based platform fearing competition – even if a function to protect its content exists. As additional tool, some of them would like to see developed a database of partners involved in Alpine Space projects since the first programming period or a video explaining and illustrating the concept of result orientation for Interreg projects.

Comparison with programming period 2007-2013

The evidence gathered with this evaluation on applicants' satisfaction has been compared with the outcomes of surveys on closed projects of the period 2007-2013⁶. If the programme guidance documents and events remain as useful as they were for applicants in the previous programming period, the support from the programme bodies is better appreciated in 2014-2020 than in 2007-2013. While in 2014-2020, 81% of respondents rate this support "very good" or "good", in 2007-2013 they were only 69% to declare the support of ACPs "useful" to "extremely useful" during the preparation phase, and 66% for the JS. The slight difference in figures between ACP and JS is confirmed by the 2014-2020 survey findings that the support by ACPs is considered more effective in the first step and the JS support in the second.

The programme documents still benefit from a very large approbation, with 90% of 2014-2020 respondents considering the information provided sufficiently to very useful for the setup of their project proposal. The 2007-2013 project partners were also 94% to consider the project implementation handbook "useful" to "very useful".

The programme events organised for project applicants (national information events, applicant seminar) are also very much appreciated, with over 70% of respondents in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods declaring them to be "useful" to "very useful".

The individual support (direct feedback via skype/telephone, individual consultations) from JS or ACP seems to have improved in quality between the two programming periods, the support from programme bodies being increasingly appreciated by respondents.

⁶ These surveys were answered by 33 lead or project partners out of the 57 projects co-financed in 2007-2013. The topics addressed concerned mainly the perception of lead/project partners on the usefulness of programme bodies, documents and events during the preparation phase of their application



A benchmark to other Interreg programmes

The Alpine Space offer of services to applicants is similar to that of other transnational or interregional cooperation programmes. However, the support services offered by the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme and also preferred by beneficiaries are more based on one-time and personal contact than on e-tools. Successful practices exist in other Interreg programmes (e.g. Interreg Europe) in the use of tutorials and audio-visual material, online trainings and webinars (online meetings). The use of such e-tools could be further explored by the Alpine Space programme.

Application process

Findings

- The programme is successful in attracting applications and (potential) beneficiaries. An increase by 65% in the number of requests for funding has been registered compared to the previous programme (first two calls of both programmes).
- Lower success rates of proposals are linked to greater attractiveness of the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme and the increase in the number of applications against a level of funding which has not increased proportionally.
- Programme procedures are mostly effective in targeting the programme objectives and envisaged results in terms of specific objectives and types of beneficiaries (including private partners). However, two of the seven specific objectives of the programme are poorly tackled, namely SO2.2 and SO3.1.
- Measures such as thematic terms of reference have proved successful in attracting proposals in areas of particular interest for the programme, e.g. addressing migration challenges and/or tackling the underachievement of some of its specific objectives. However, there is still room for improvement in this regard.
- The 2-step application procedure is generally appreciated and preferred to the single-step procedure, both by applicants and by programme body members. Although perceived to be longer than a single step procedure, this is outweighed by its advantages: it is believed to keep low the administrative burden for applicants and improve the quality of proposals.
- Stakeholders consider the application procedure as time-consuming but (on average) not more than in other Interreg programmes. The call duration for the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme is in line with other similar programmes.



- For programme bodies, the 2-step approach implies more complexity and higher administrative costs than in a single step application procedure.
- Opinions vary greatly among the applicants on the time for the preparation and submission of the AF. However, this is overall considered as sufficient.
- The limited space in some sections of the AF (work plan) constrains the applicants to vulgarise and shorten the content description.
- Application has been made completely paperless for applicants, through the use of the electronic monitoring system, eMS (developed by INTERACT).
- According to some of the applicants/beneficiaries interviewed, national requirements represent a source of additional complexity. In particular it is often difficult for the LP to monitor the process of verification of all different national requirements.
- The programme has reduced administrative burden for applicants. However, simplification could be pushed forward for instance in the rationalisation of national requirements.

Programme attractiveness

In the whole 2007-2013 period and across five calls for proposals, the programme received a total of 412 applications for funding. Only half-way in its implementation period and after 3 calls, Alpine Space 2014-2020 received already 445 applications for funding. This represents already an increase by 8% in the number of proposals in approximately half of the time. The increase goes up to 65% if comparing similar periods of time (i.e. the first two calls of both programme periods). These figures illustrate the success of the programme in attracting projects and, for the latter, an increased level of competition.

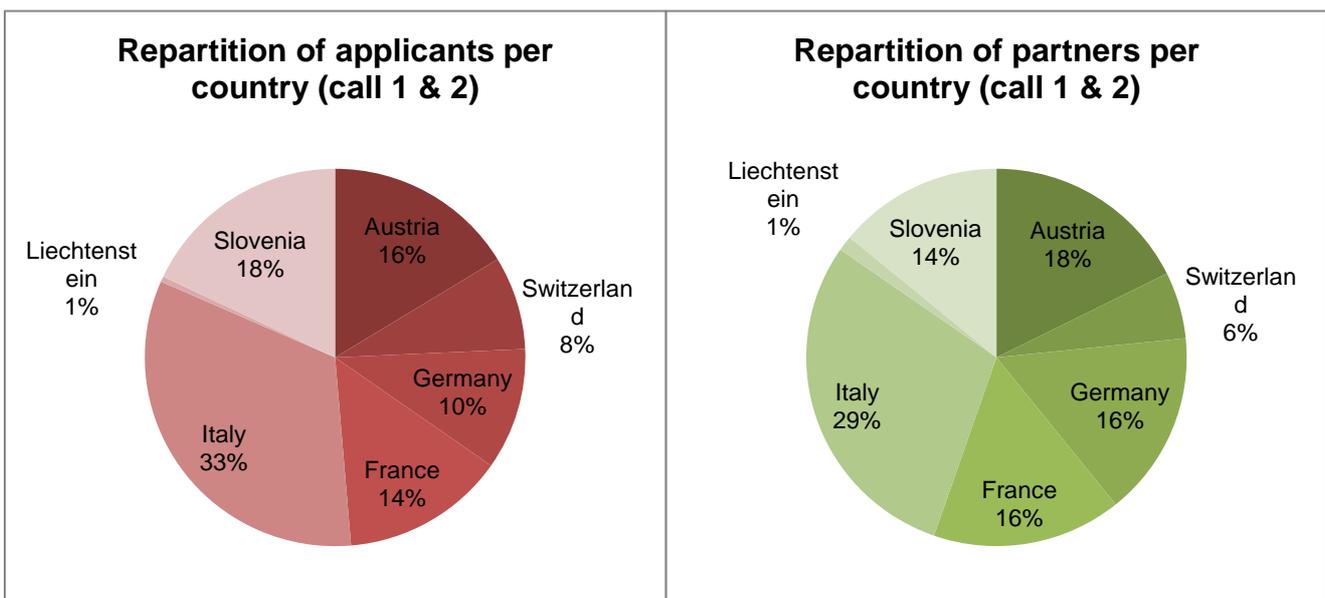
Because the assessment of call 3 is still ongoing, data on its success rate are not yet available. Therefore the following analysis focuses only on the first two calls of the current and previous programme periods (to allow comparison of similar data). Competition remains very high in step 1, where approximately 20% of the submitted EoI proceed to step 2. This amount remained quite constant between the two studied periods (i.e. 21% for 2007-2013 and 19% for 2014-2020). Success rate in step 2 instead has passed from 63% to 53% from the previous to the current period. Throughout all application steps, the current success rate is of 10%, with a drop by 2% compared to the 2007-2013 period. Lower success rates of proposals are linked to greater attractiveness of the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme and the increase in the number of applications against a level of funding which has not increased proportionally.

The repartition of applicants/partners per countries is partly linked to the geographic and demographic importance of the countries in the cooperation area, but other factors play a role, e.g. among others the

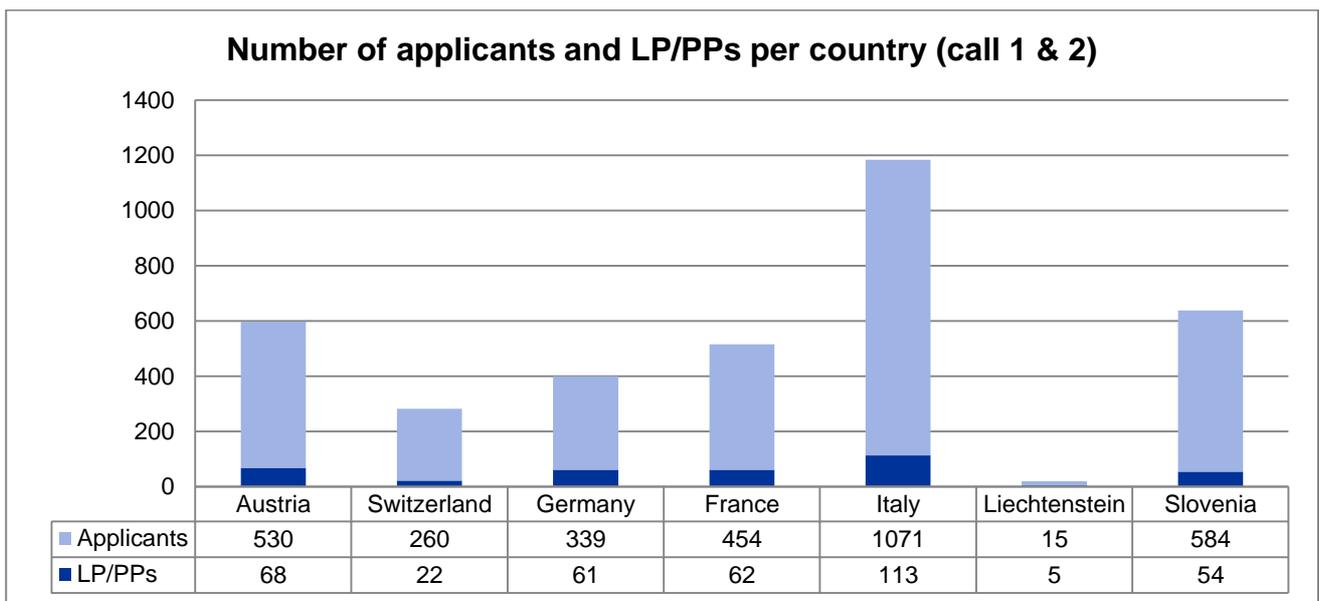
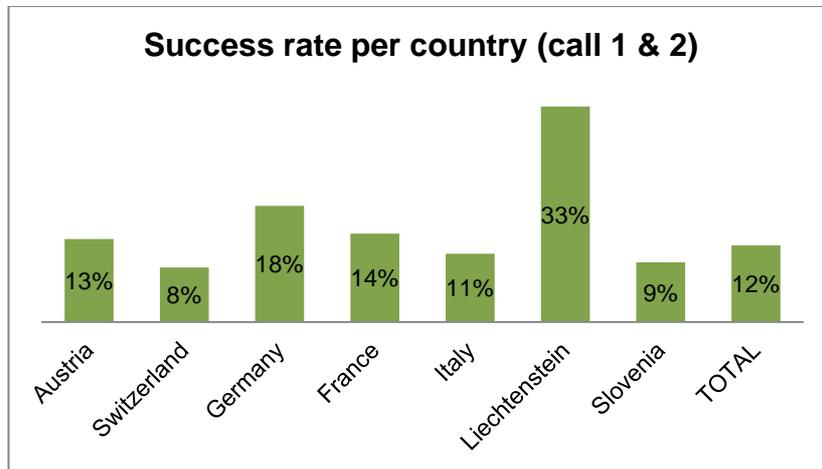


specialisation, interest or facility to engage in the programme. As for the past, a reason for the high participation of Italian partners could be the automatic match-funding provided by the national revolving fund (Fondo di rotazione) to public and public equivalent institutions involved as lead partner/partner in an approved project. Italy alone thus accounts for a third (33%) of applicants in the first two calls of the 2014-2020 period, whereas Switzerland and Liechtenstein, the two non-EU Partner States, represent respectively 8% and 1% of applicants.

Differences can however be observed between the share of applicants of a country and its share in partners of approved projects. Three countries are slightly less represented among partners of approved projects than among project applicants: Italy (4% less partners than applicants), Slovenia (4% less) and Switzerland (2% less). On the other hand, some are slightly over-represented compared to their number of applicants: Germany (6% more), Austria (2% more partners than applicants) and France (2% more).



These differences are better illustrated through the success rate of applicants per country. As written above, some countries exceed the average success rate of 12%, such as Germany (18% of successful applicants), France (14%) and Austria (13%). This may be linked to the relevance of applicants or to the quality of support from ACP of different countries. Although there are fewer applicants from Germany for instance, they would more often be relevant and thus likely to become partners of approved projects. Applicants from Liechtenstein also engage more rarely in Alpine Space projects, but with more success since 1 out of 3 becomes a partner of an approved project. On the other hand, despite representing the largest share of applicants, the success rate of Italian bodies is of only 11%.

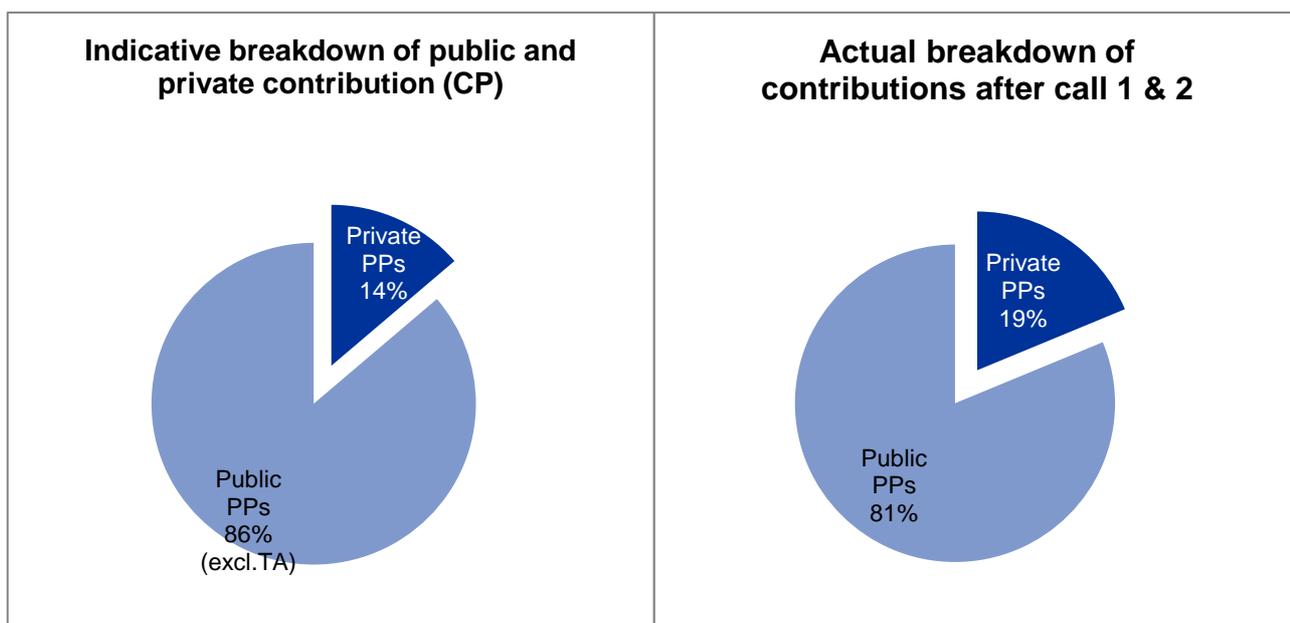


As regards the involvement of private partners in Alpine Space projects, the first two calls basically fulfill the objectives of the programming period as foreseen in the cooperation programme.

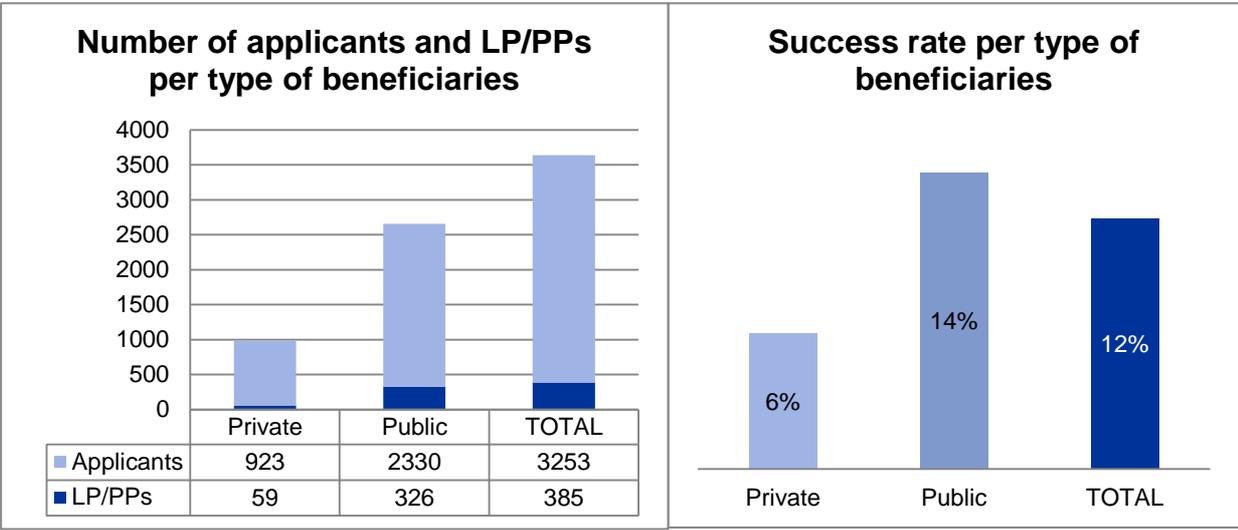


Legal status	Indicative contribution	Actual contribution (after call 1 & 2)
Private	€ 2,655,174.00	€ 2,606,320.61
Public (without TA)	€16,692,593.00	€11,321,618.48
Total	€19,347,767.00	€13,927,939.09

Whereas the CP planned 14% of private contribution, private partners from call 1 and 2 already bring 19% of the foreseen contributions.



With 59 partners, private entities represent 15% of PPs in the programming period 2014-2020, whereas they were only 10% in the whole 2007-2013. This represents an interesting increase in the representation of private partners. They also account for as much as 28% of applicants. However, their success rate is lower than that of public organisations (6% against 14%).



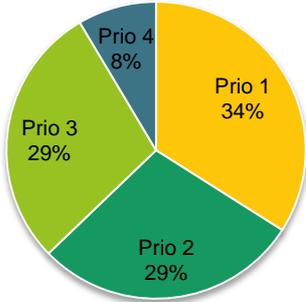
Progress of the programme specific objectives

After two calls for proposals, the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme has approved 33 projects and covered all of its seven specific objectives (SO). It is well on track for the achievement of its targets, as set in the cooperation programme (CP) and in its performance framework. The repartition of approved projects per priority roughly corresponds to the allocation of ERDF budget foreseen in the CP (see graphs below) with 34% for priority 1, about 29% each for priorities 2 and 3 and 8% for priority 4. However, not all SO are progressing the same. While some SO represents a higher share of approved projects than of applications, for others the important number of applications is not reflected in the proportion of approved projects.

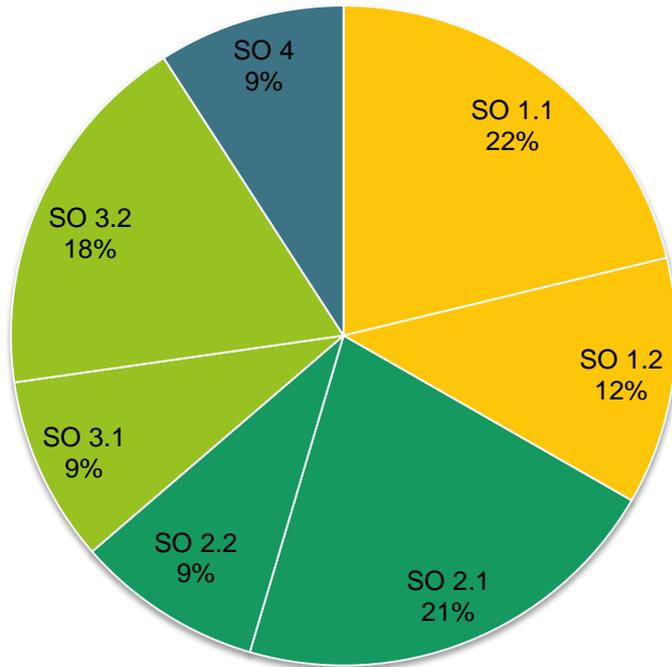
The two most solicited are SO 1.1 (Improve the framework conditions for innovation in the Alpine space) and SO 3.1 (Sustainably valorise Alpine Space cultural and natural heritage), which represent respectively 21% and 23% of the applications received. However, less projects are finally approved under SO 3.1 (only 3 in two calls). SO 2.2. and SO 4 have similar outcomes but with different dynamics. For SO 2.2 a lack of proposals can be observed (with only 27 proposals submitted in two calls) resulting in a limited number of approved projects despite a success rate slightly above average. SO 4 instead can be considered as performing well, giving the more limited resources allocated to this project in the CP.



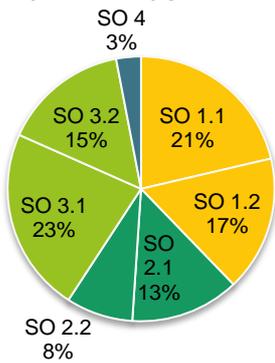
Repartition of ERDF budget allocated in CP per priority



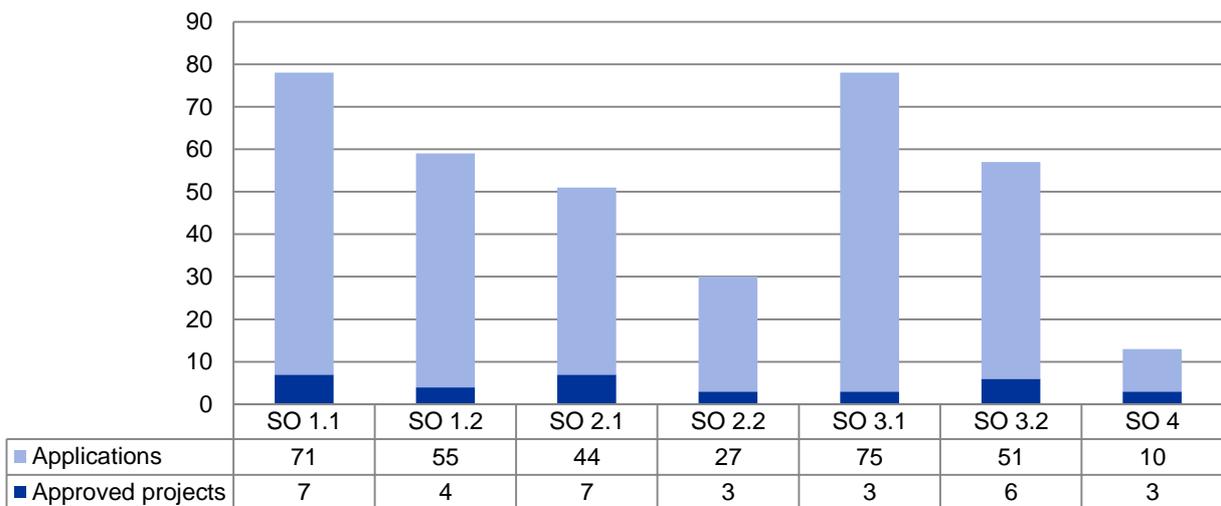
Repartition of approved projects (call 1 & 2) per SO



Repartition of applications (call 1 & 2) per SO

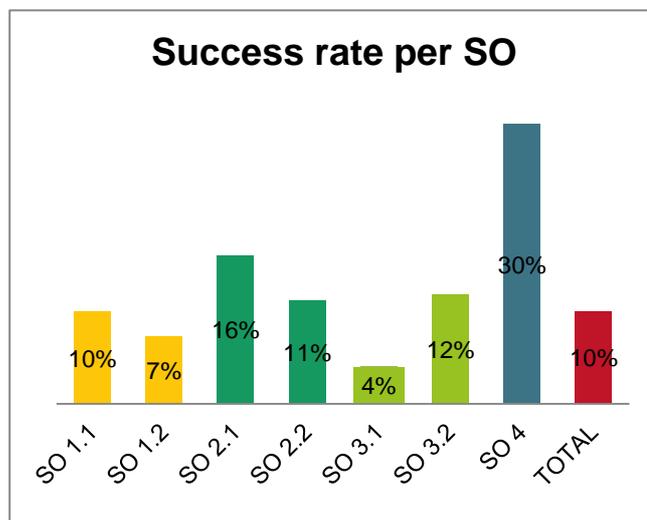


Number of applications and approved projects per SO (call 1 & 2)





This difference is made visible through the success rates for each specific objective: SO 4 (Increase the application of multilevel and transnational governance in the Alpine Space) for instance is well above the average of 10% of approved projects with 30% of successful applications, while only 4% of applications presented under SO 3.1 are approved. The quality of applications and their relevance for the programme's objectives mostly account for the differentiated success rates under each specific objectives.



Among the steps taken to stimulate projects in specific areas of interest, the programme has adopted thematic terms of reference since its call 2. It applied a combined top-down and bottom-up approach: a number of topics were specifically targeted by the terms of reference but applicants were still free to submit projects in other fields of intervention. This approach proved quite successful in attracting project proposals in new areas of interest such as migration challenges. Also, all 6 projects in SO 2.2 and SO 3.1 were approved in call 2 thus improving the situation of underachievement registered by these specific objectives. Still, some national coordinators stressed the importance of better defining the terms of reference and the priority topics, in addition to allocating extra points in the assessment of proposals successfully addressing these topics.

Compared to findings in previous evaluations, this seems to remain an area for improvement⁷. The same applies to the capacity of the programme to attract a satisfactory level of quality proposals in all SO and to better accompany applicants in tackling certain topics at the transnational level.

Measures to support project quality and result orientation

The Alpine Space programme has long since introduced a 2-step approach for project application. Applicants first submit a project concept (expression of interest - EoI) and only if successful they develop a full proposal (application form – AF). This aims at reducing the administrative burden and costs of application for beneficiaries, but it also and most importantly an effective mean for supporting project quality. This is recognised by both applicants and programme bodies. The programme has put increasing efforts in this by intensifying the support provided between the two steps of application procedure through the services described above. Also, specific requirements at the application stage are meant to support project quality, in

⁷ See above Mid-term evaluation of 2000-2006 period.



particular the obligatory contact of the lead partner with the ACP of their countries (extended for some countries also to the project partners). The importance of such contact is particularly stressed and this is even made an eligibility requirement in both steps of application.

Emphasis has been put in this programme period on linking the programme's and projects' intervention logic and on strengthening result orientation. This has been reflected in a number of measures:

- result focus has been made a key aspect of the support services provided to applicants, both by ACP and JS (as described above)
- the structure of application documents, which mirrors the programme intervention logic and requires applicants to develop on their concrete contribution to the programme goals and expected results
- specific assessment criteria, aiming at appraising such contribution
- the introduction of simplification measures, which have been made a priority to shift application efforts from procedural aspects to content and result orientation.

Simplification measures at the stage of application

A number of simplification measures have been introduced to make applying to Alpine Space more efficient and result focused. These include:

- slim EoI: the format of the EoI has been subject to subsequent revisions in order to simplify its structure and avoid duplicating information to the utmost;
- paperless application: the EoI/AF and the partnership agreement are all and only submitted via the eMS and no wet signature is required
- simplified cost options for the design of the project budget: a lump sum is applied for the financing of preparations costs in the setting up of a project proposal; flat rates have been introduced for two cost categories (staff and administration costs/overheads).

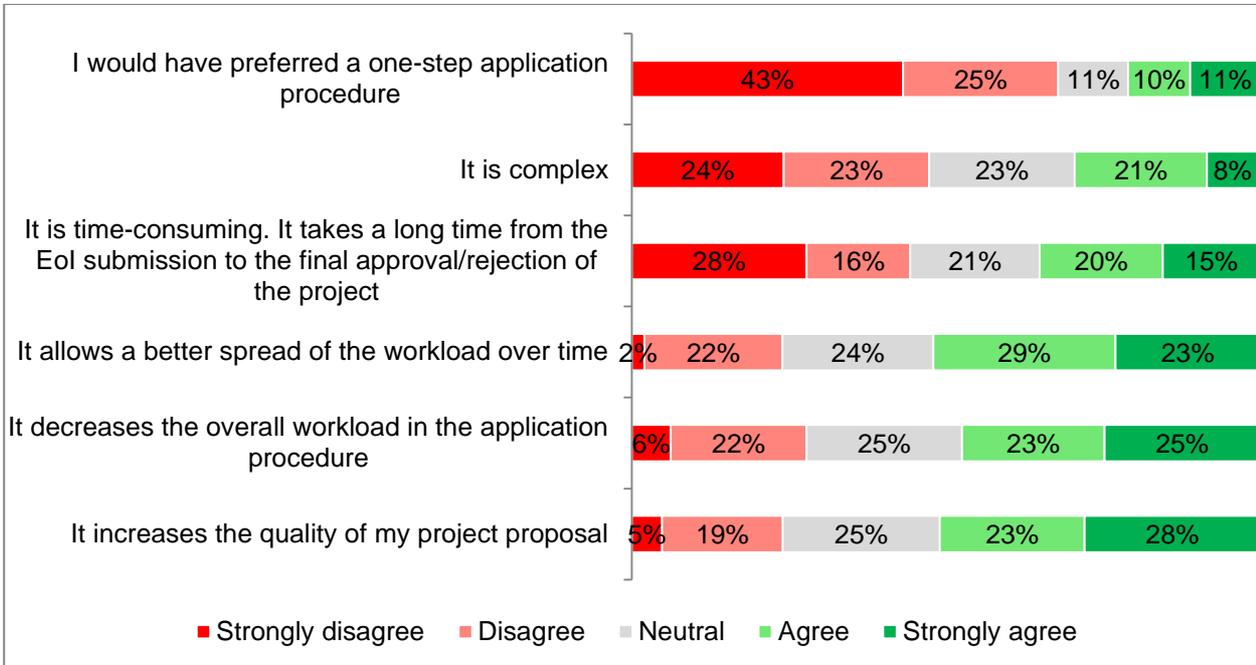
The stakeholders' perception

The Alpine Space 2-step application procedure is appreciated by a majority of the stakeholders solicited: national coordinators and applicants. The former are satisfied with the 2-step procedure as it is effective in avoiding low-quality projects to be presented to the PC. For national coordinators, the procedure in two steps is perceived to be longer than in a single step but this is outweighed by the advantages of the two steps, in their opinion.

Among call 2 applicants, only 21% would have preferred a one-step procedure, while 43% are strongly against it (outcome of survey).



- Applicants survey - Question: To which degree do you agree with the statements concerning the two-step application procedure?



The majority of respondents value the advantages of the 2-step procedure: it increases the quality of their project proposal (51%), allows for a better spread of the workload over time (52%) and decreases the overall workload in the application procedure (48%). In terms of complexity and timing the opinions diverge. A relative majority of 47% of respondents consider that the 2-step application is not complex and 44% do not find it so time-consuming, against 35% finding that it takes a long time from the EoI submission to the final approval or rejection of the project. Arguments in favour of a single step procedure are equally varied: it is found by some as easier, less burdensome and more efficient (more focused effort); for a serious and competitive EoI, some respondents consider necessary having developed the whole project concept in step 1 thus demanding an important work investment already at that stage; respondents also underline the subsequent frustration and disappointment when the project proposal is rejected in the 2nd step; a 1-step procedure is believed to allow for a fairer judgment as the EoI cannot put the evaluator in the conditions of understanding properly the project contents.

For the focus group participants, the 2-step procedure offers more opportunity to test a project idea. They deemed the duration of the AF submission period sufficient. However, some regret that pre-information on the launch and content of the calls is not provided earlier (before the publication of terms of reference).

On the measures introduced by the programme to increase project quality and result orientation, applicants



find that there is still room for improvement. For some participants to the focus group, the limited space in some sections of the AF constrains the applicants to use acronyms and to shorten the content, which affects the quality of the proposal. This would be true especially for the work plan section in the AF.

Simplification measures could also be extended to national requirements, in the view of participants to the focus group. In the application phase, applicants are requested to comply with a number of requirements set at national level. National requirements aim at providing information to the ACP for performing national verifications (e.g. on the capacity of the lead partner/partners to perform its role in the project) as well as to support project quality (obligatory contact with the ACP). However, they differ from country to country and from the first step of the application procedure to the second. In addition, for some countries applicants are required to elaborate a separate “national” application document describing the relevance of the project and the role of the project partners from their country, in addition to the information provided in the EoI/AF. National requirements are faulted as difficult to monitor for the LP, and applicants would prefer them to be submitted in the 2nd step only, when elaborating the application form (outcomes of the focus group). Harmonisation of national requirements and the reduction in their number is also found as a concrete simplification by the JS interviewees.

2-step approach: efficiency in call management

The 2-step approach implies less burden and lower costs for setting up a proposal in step 1. For the programme bodies, on the other hand, it implies more complexity and higher administrative costs than in a single step application procedure: each of the selected proposals goes twice through the eligibility check, assessment, PC written procedures and selection meetings. This, coupled with the significant increase in the number of proposals, has meant additional administrative efforts for programme bodies. Calls have therefore lasted longer than in the past. From their opening to the selection decision, the overall duration of calls passed from an average of 31 weeks (7 to 8 months) in the period 2007-2013 to 37 weeks (8 to 10 months) in the period 2014-2020⁸. Differently, the time needed by the programme to perform the evaluation of proposals remained constant between the two periods: it lasted in average 8.5 weeks both for step 1 and step 2. The difference between the two periods lies in the timing of the first call of the 2014-2020 period: here the programme record on the number of proposals was registered (219), and both the evaluation and the submission period in step 2 were longer than the 2007-2013 average.

Between the two programme periods, the number of applications received by the Alpine Space programme for the first two calls increased by 65% (from 201 to 332), while the average call duration increased only by 19% (from 31 to 37 weeks). Call management procedures can thus be considered as efficient.

⁸ Data concern 2-step calls for proposals in both programme periods. For Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme, data are limited to the first two calls completed.



Table: Duration of the different steps of the evaluation and selection process in the ASP 2014-2020 (in weeks)

	Submission EoI	Evaluation EoI	Decision PC	Submission AF	Evaluation AF	Decision PC	TOTAL
Average 2007-2013	6	6	2	7	6	2	31
Duration foreseen in CP	6	6	2	10	10	2	36
Call 1	6	9	2	13	10	2	42
Call 2	4	5	4	7	8	3	31

A benchmark to other Interreg programmes

The settings of application procedures change significantly from programme to programme (e.g. 1-step versus 2-step, longer versus shorter application phases, etc.) and the same is true for the administrative settings and resources of the programme bodies involved in project evaluation. Also, as explained above on the methodology, a benchmark study is not available for Interreg programmes and comparison has been made based on the information provided on programme manuals and websites – with all the limits connected to such data collection. For this reason, a comparison across programmes is difficult and can only be tentative. Nonetheless, such a comparison can be interesting to position the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme among its peers and identify potential areas for improvement.

In terms of success rate, Alpine Space 2014-2020 reaches comparable levels to most other programmes: as much as Central Europe and 4% less than North West Europe – although with quite a difference in the number of proposals received in both cases. IR Europe is an interesting benchmark: it approved 28% of the 472 applications received in its first two calls. The programmes analysed also have different call settings. Alpine Space and North West Europe apply a 2-step procedure, IR Europe a single step and Central Europe has applied both in subsequent calls. The latter has passed from a success rate of only 6% in its first call (2-step) to 24% in the second call (1-step). Out of the comparison among these four programmes, there seems thus to be a link between 2-step application procedures and lower success rates – or lower quality of applications for funding in the first step.



Table: Benchmark of Interreg programmes – Number of applications received and success rates

Programme	Application procedure	No. of applications received			No. of projects approved			Success rate
		Call 1	Call 2	Total	Call 1	Call 2	Total	
Alpine Space 2014-2020	2-step*	219	113	332	9	24	33	10%
Central Europe 2014-2020	mix**	620	210	830	35	50	85	10%
IR Europe 2014-2020	1-step	261	211	472	64	66	130	28%
North West Europe 2014-2020	2-step	82	86	168	9	14	23	14%

* For Alpine Space, the 1-step invitation for a EUSALP project is not included.

** For Central Europe, the first call has been run with a 2-step application procedure where the second call was a 1-step procedure.

Also concerning overall call management (application and selection phases), Alpine Space 2014-2020 reaches comparable levels to most other programmes. If programmes applying a 1-step application procedure take on average 35 weeks (or 9 months) from the launch of a call to a funding decision, those with a 2-step approach take on average 48 weeks (or 12 months). In this respect, the 2-step application procedure of Alpine Space 2014-2020 can be considered as working efficiently, with an average of 37 weeks (or 9 months).

Again, IR Europe one-step calls are shorter (i.e. 30 weeks or 8 months). Beyond a quantitative comparison, practices from this programme are also of interest: this programme has kept its traditional 1-step application procedure but introduced a strategic assessment based on which only the proposals passing this strategic assessment are evaluated in full – with consequent gains in the assessment efforts and time.

The abovementioned study on “Gold-Plating, in the European structural and investment funds” is another interesting benchmark on the user-friendliness and simplification of the application procedure. The study has a focus on ESIF funds and not only on Interreg programmes. It looks at those additional national, regional or local rules and regulations (or failures to apply simplification measures) which are introduced in programme management (so called gold plating). With regard to the application procedure, the Alpine Space programme can be considered as performing well but with room for improvement. On the one hand, there is a slim application package made only of the EoI/AF and, in step 2, the partnership agreement. Submission of these documents is completely paperless as they are all submitted via the eMS. Hard copies and wet signatures are limited to the very core: the subsidy contract (at the end of the process). On the other hand, national requirements account for up to 10 additional documents for a single partner. They differ from country to country and from the first step of the application procedure to the second. For some countries applicants are even required to elaborate a separate “national” application document describing the relevance of the project



and the role of each of the project partners from their country, duplicating information provided in the EoI/AF already. As mentioned above, national requirements aim at providing information to the ACP for performing national verifications (e.g. on the legal status of applicants). A simplification in national requirements may though reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries at the stage of application.

The practices of the Interreg Central Europe and Interreg Europe programmes may be of interest in this respect. In the former, for some countries the national contact points proactively contact applicants where needed to check their legal status or refer to public registers. In the latter, application documents do not include national requirements and aspects such as the check on the legal status of applicants is ensured by the Member States at a later the stage. It has to be recognised though that the application packages of these programmes are made of a higher number of documents than in the Alpine Space programme.

Selection procedure

Findings

- Assessment criteria are clear and coherent. Those concerning relevance of the partnership and transnationality though are perceived by applicants as difficult to tackle, partly due to lack of clarity in the programme expectations.
- Thematic expertise would help the JS to assess the quality of projects proposals in specific fields (e.g. innovation).
- Terms of reference could better support the selection of high quality projects.
- Applicants are satisfied with the explanations provided on the outcomes of the evaluation and selection procedure. The assessment report is the main source of information on the selection outcomes.
- However, transparency could be enhanced: applicants should especially all receive the same level of information on the outcomes of the assessment and selection.
- Applicants would like the assessment report to include the final score given to project proposals.
- Most NC/ACPs are satisfied with the transparency and clarity of the evaluation and selection process whereas others highlight the need for increased transparency of the selection procedure.

Project evaluation and selection

The Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme has largely adopted the project evaluation criteria developed by INTERACT as part of harmonised implementation tools (HIT). In addition, Alpine Space has used a system



of weighted scores which are different depending on the assessment criteria; the latter are gathered in cluster criteria. This is meant to reflect the higher importance attached to some criteria as opposed to others. After subsequent simplifications, the assessment grid now includes up to 27 criteria and 7 clusters (in step 2). The outcomes of the evaluation by the JS are provided in an assessment report. Following the recommendations of previous appraisals⁹, this report outlines strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. It also includes the reasons for approval or rejection by the PC as well as recommendations from the PC on how to improve the proposal in step 2 or how to better implement the project – where approved. The Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme does not apply conditions for approval. However, projects selected for funding receive a letter of deficiencies from the JS, where more technical aspects are addressed for the subsequent revision of the AF before the subsidy contract can be signed.

The stakeholders' perception

Project assessment criteria are positively perceived by the majority of stakeholders. However, applicants underline difficulties in tackling some of them, namely relevance of the partnership and transnationality. For partnership, for instance, more clarity is wished on the expectations of the programme as regards its composition, the need for public administrations and policy makers to be directly involved and the extension of such involvement as opposed to private partners. Among programme bodies, it is consensus that the criteria applied enable to fund high quality projects. However, some of the NC/ACP as well as the JS and MA interviewees mentioned that the selection criteria are rather complex and could be further improved. In particular, the high number of criteria brings in the risks of an excessive focus on details and thus of losing the overall picture on the quality of a project proposal, JS staff pointed out.

According to the participants to the focus group and to some of the NC, thematic expertise would also be needed to complement the programme bodies in evaluating project proposals in specific fields (e.g. innovation). As also recognised by the interviewed JS staff members, officers have a thematic knowledge in the programme priority they are responsible for but are not field experts; for specific issues they may refer to EC officers and their network with other colleagues of other programmes whenever needed/possible. For very technical proposals, the programme also foresees the possibility to contract specific thematic expertise, upon request from the national delegations. In this context it should also be mentioned that the members of the national committees are on the one hand experts themselves in certain fields and on the other hand they also consult other experts and are therefore able to bring in expert view into the selection process.

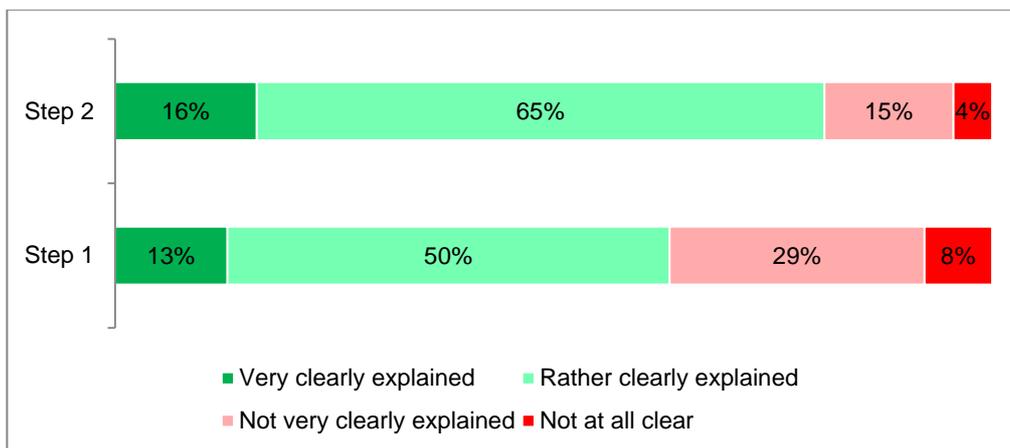
⁹ See above reference to the Quality process.



It is the opinion of some of the interviewed national coordinators that terms of reference could better support the selection of high quality projects, by allocating extra points in the assessment to those proposals addressing the topics highlighted in the terms of reference.

The approach for explaining to project applicants the outcomes of the project evaluation and selection is generally perceived by national coordinators to be sufficiently transparent and clear. In case of a rejection a large majority of interviewees considers the explanations of the reasons for rejections given by the JS as clear and well defined. This seems to be confirmed by applicants: according to the majority of respondents to the survey, the outcomes of the evaluation and selection process are clearly explained under both steps: 63% of satisfaction for step 1 and 81% for step 2.

- Applicants survey - Question: In your view, is the outcome of the assessment and selection process sufficiently explained to applicants?



Most of them learnt about the outcomes of the selection procedure through the assessment report provided to lead applicants (at 72%), but also by contacting their national ACP (20%) or the JS (7%). The direct meeting (face-to-face or through skype) with programme bodies following the evaluation is well appreciated by the applicants. For those passing the different steps of the selection procedure, the individual consultation with the JS and the letter of deficiency is also considered as an important tool for final improvement of the project.

However, applicants also see room for improvement: according to them the transparency of the selection process could be enhanced by including the final score of the proposal in the assessment report and a more detailed explanation of the strenghts and weaknesses of the proposal against the assessment criteria. They also regret that some applicants dispose of details on the final ranking of proposals and on reasons for the selection or rejection although not mentioned in the assessment report (while the others don't). To ensure equal access to information, a more harmonised feedback towards the applicants seems thus to be quite



essential.

A benchmark to other Interreg programmes

The Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme has overall a similar decision-making structure as the other benchmarked programmes (e.g. eligibility check and quality assessment of proposals, PC decision on selection, etc.). Also, the aspects analysed in the quality assessment of proposal have a number of similarities, including the focus on result orientation. This is partially due to the fact that Alpine Space has largely adopted the project evaluation criteria developed by INTERACT as part of harmonised implementation tools (HIT). However, the system of weighted scores and cluster criteria seem having reached a higher degree of complexity in the Alpine Space than in other programmes. Often a more limited number of criteria are used in the other benchmarked programmes and/or a weighting system of scores is not provided.

Concerning the evaluation expertise, this is normally sourced within the JS. Interreg Central Europe programme, however, has established a roster of thematic experts that are involved in the quality assessment of proposals together with the JS.

Functioning and coordination of programme bodies

Findings

- Several programme bodies are involved and a number of steps foreseen in the evaluation procedure and in the follow-up of decision on selection.
- Cooperation among the programme bodies is considered as good by all stakeholders. Communication among national coordinators and between JS and ACP is satisfying.
- Coordination is perceived as effective but with room for improvement in the relation ACP-JS.
- The programme is well connected to relevant stakeholders of the cooperation area and outside.

Management of calls for proposals

Several programme bodies are involved in the management of calls for proposals. The ACP are the ones dedicated to support applicants in project development, in both step 1 and 2 of the application procedure. The JS has a “residual role” in step 1, where it participates to national info days and organises transnational events for match-making to support the building of project partnerships. Differently in step 2, the JS



provides support to applicants through lead applicant seminars and individual consultations (see above on the support services provided by both bodies).

When it comes to project evaluation, different interactions are foreseen: the eligibility check of proposals is performed by both ACP and JS; national verifications are run by the ACP; quality assessment is performed by the JS; checks on the partnership agreement are made by the MA(in step 2). The JS applies a 4-eye principle in the eligibility and quality assessment; for the latter, a further review is also applied. It has also a coordinating role in ensuring that the required input from each of the programme bodies is provided in the eMS. An ACP/JS/MA meeting normally takes place during the assessment phase of project proposals to exchange on the evaluation process. This is an established practice in the context of the Alpine Space programme: in this context the ACPs comment on the link of proposals to national/regional/local policy instruments as well as on the relevance of project partners from the ACP country and their capacity to fulfill their role in the project. The national verifications performed by the ACP and the project evaluation of the JS are support tools for decision-making by the PC.

The PC is the programme body deciding on both the eligibility and selection of project proposals; decisions are taken by consensus of all Partner States. Decision-making processes are stipulated in the cooperation programme document and regulated by the rules of procedures and programme rules (e.g. on eligibility, project selection). The PC also agrees on the formulation of recommendations for improvement to project applicants (to better the proposal in step 2 or, if approved, in their implementation).

In both steps, communication on the outcomes of project selection is provided via the programme website (where successful proposals are listed) and in individual letters addressed by the JS on behalf of the MA to the lead applicants of all submitted project proposals. This communication includes the assessment report (for projects passing the eligibility check).

In addition, projects selected for funding (step 2) receive a letter of deficiencies by the JS, where more technical aspects are addressed for the subsequent revision of the AF before the subsidy contract can be signed by the MA and the project contracted.

Finally, the JS supports project start through the organisation of lead partners seminars and the participation to projects kick-off meetings.

The graphic below summarises the role of programme bodies in the whole process of project evaluation and selection – for simplification reasons, functions which are repeated in both steps of the procedure are

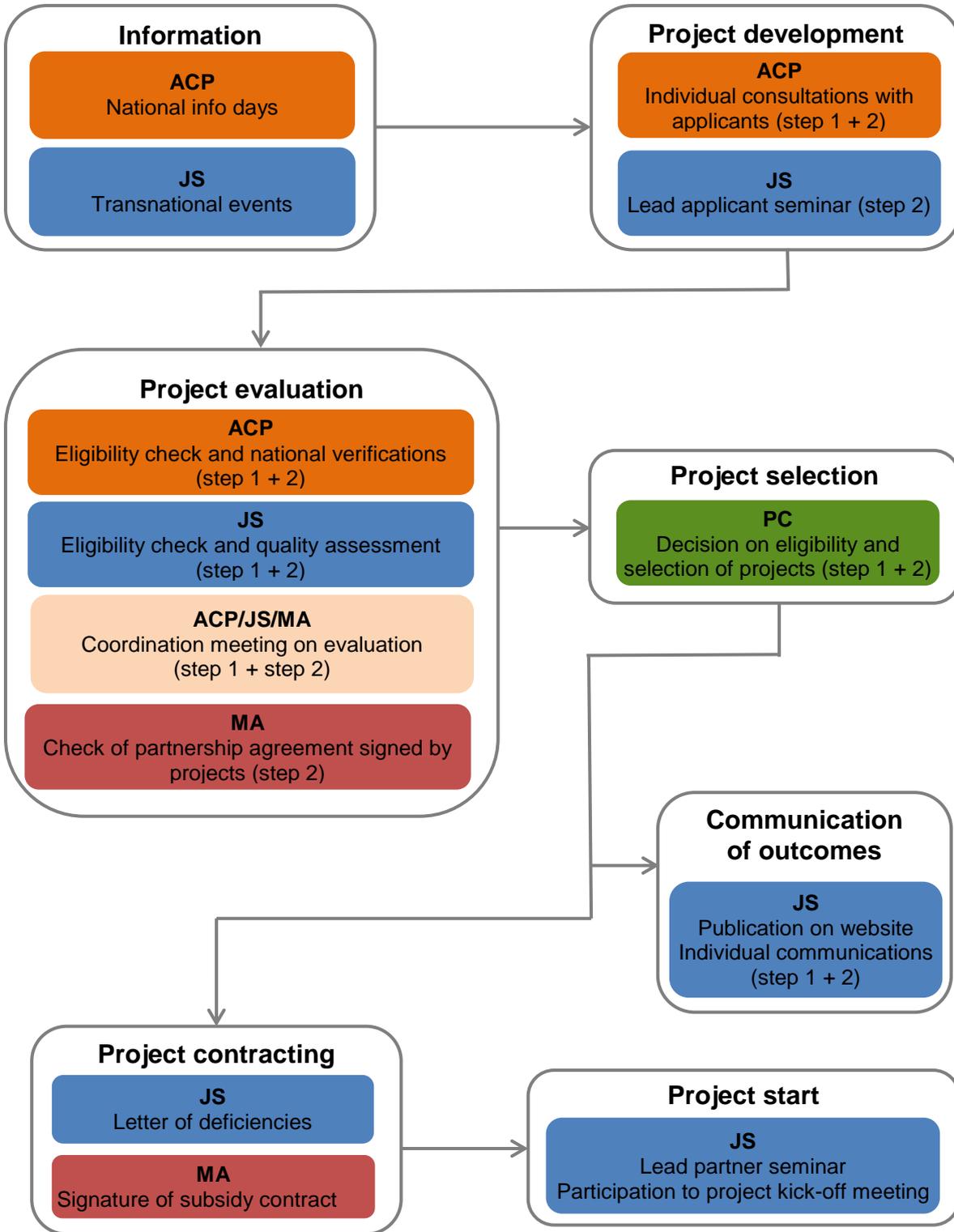


merged together.

As shown in the graph, the management of call for proposals is made of different stages, mostly duplicated for each of the 2-step application procedure. ACP and JS play a role in a number of such stages in both step 1 and 2 – which makes their involvement quite intensive when compared to the human resources dedicated to it (especially for the ACP). Also, functions are rarely under the exclusive responsibility of a programme body. Project evaluation is the function where up to three bodies are involved. This requires a good coordination and quite an administrative effort, particularly on the side of the JS who has a coordinating function and also normally consolidates the different checks into the final assessment report and/or letter of deficiencies.



Call management and programme bodies



Coordination of programme bodies

As described above, there is high interaction among programme bodies. JS and ACP work particularly close together on many topics. Regular meetings between ACP, JS and MA are organised to ensure smooth collaboration between the three programme bodies. These are held, on average, a minimum of twice per year, usually within the framework of a call for project proposals. In addition, intensive workshops are organised upon need on specific issues (e.g. sharing of tasks, review of programme practices, etc.). Coordination between ACP and JS as well as between MA and JS are also ensured through regular contact and virtual meetings for any day-to-day management matters.

External coordination of programme bodies is ensured with a number of relevant stakeholders in the programme area and outside. The JS is actively involved in numerous networks established by INTERACT with Interreg programmes. This supports exchange of experiences and know-how in programme management and mutualisation of efforts in complying with EU rules and procedures. It resulted for instance in the adoption of harmonised tools for project application and selection as well as of the eMS. Through representatives of the Partner States, of the MA and/or JS, the programme is also actively involved in the work of the Alpine Convention and of the European macro-regional strategy for the Alps (EUSALP). Coordination with the EUSALP and contribution to its implementation has been a new focus of the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme. It has been so far articulated in a number of measures: primarily through the co-financing of projects directly contributing to the strategy and where relevant proposed by its action groups' members; the contribution to EUSALP implementation is one of the core assessment criteria of project evaluation. The programme has also directly supported EUSALP governance and the work of its action groups through a specific project (AlpGov). Finally, soft measures such as cooperation in events/meetings have been implemented.

Stakeholder's perception

The repartition of functions among programme bodies is found to be clear by most stakeholders. In the view of the JS interviewees, project evaluation may be simplified.

With regard to the cooperation among programme bodies, this is perceived as good by all the stakeholders. National coordinators interviewees also consider that the communication among them and between JS and ACP is satisfying, although with room for improvement for some. The latter consider that the coordination of the ACP network could be reinforced by the JS. In the opinion of the JS interviewees, further assessing how to modulate such coordination and for which aspects of the programme management this is more required would be beneficial for providing better services. They point at the review of project generation support as a good experience in the simplification of functions which may be extended to other areas of the programme



management: this function has been shifted from a shared ACP-JS task to an ACP one, thus bringing more clarity to the applicants on whom to address for support.

Concerning the ACP/JS/MA meeting during the assessment of project proposals, this opportunity for exchange is part of the positive cooperation among ACP, JS and MA but it also poses a risk that the JS be influenced in the assessment of projects, in the opinion of JS interviewees.

A benchmark to other Interreg programmes

Despite some similarities, the interplay of programme bodies vary across the benchmarked programmes. It can though be concluded that the function of project evaluation seems to be more streamlined and normally performed by the JS only, based on the programme eligibility and assessment criteria (decided by the PC and stipulated in programme documents). In Interreg Central Europe programme as well as the Alpine Space, the national contact points run technical verifications (e.g. on the financial capacity of applicants).



Key findings and recommendations

Support to applicants

EQ 1 : How well are programme bodies (ACP and JS) supporting (potential) applicants in project generation?

Key findings	Recommendations
<p>The approaches and instruments to support applicants in the project development phase are overall appreciated by the stakeholders (support is generally considered effective by applicants and satisfaction has increased compared with the 2007-2013 period).</p>	
<p>The assistance provided by the JS is strongly appreciated, especially under step 2 of the application process. The satisfaction on ACP support varies from country to country, due to an unequal availability and lack of uniform messages provided to applicants.</p>	<p>Reinforce the support provided by JS to the ACP in order to reduce differences in terms of the quality of the services provided by the ACP in the different partner countries.</p> <p>National Authorities are invited to monitor and verify the quality of the support of provided by the ACP (i.e. by gathering formal and informal inputs from applicants and beneficiaries).</p>
<p>Overall, the programme documents are largely used by applicants, with the exception of the eMS guidance being under-used. Programme documents provide relevant and useful information for the development of project proposals. However, according to some of the applicants/beneficiaries interviewed, language could be simplified, style be less prescriptive and focus more on the “how to” develop and implement projects. Overlaps across factsheets could also be avoided.</p> <p>The programme website offers a good repository of documents, but according to some of the</p>	<p>In general stakeholders are satisfied with the quality of the programme documents, website and of the online tools. From the evaluators perspective, support to applicants could be further improved by investing additional resources (if available) in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. additional opportunities for applicants for direct consultations with JS (which appear as the most appreciated and effective type of support.); 2. increasing the support/guidance provided by the JS to the ACP; 3. more match-making events to support



<p>applicants/beneficiaries interviewed, its organisation could be reviewed and additional functions added so as to ease its use.</p> <p>The project idea and partner search tools are meant specifically for newcomers but suffer from potential inadequacy to the needs of applicants, who are reluctant to publish on web-based tools details about their project fearing competition.</p> <p>Programme events are well-attended and appreciated.</p> <p>Direct feedback and individual consultations are considered by beneficiaries as the most useful support services in improving the project proposals</p>	<p>newcomers in partners' search.</p>
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Application process

EQ 2 : How effective are application procedures? How well are application procedures targeting the programme objectives and envisaged results?

In particular for the 2-step application process: how efficient is it for applicants and programme bodies; in how far is it supporting high quality projects to be submitted to the programme?

Are there areas for improvement?

Key findings	Recommendations
<p>The programme is successful in attracting applications and (potential) beneficiaries. An increase by 65% in the number of requests for funding has been registered compared to the previous programme (first two calls of both programmes).</p>	



<p>Lower success rates of proposals are linked to greater attractiveness of the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme and the increase in the number of applications against a level of funding which has not increased proportionally.</p>	<p>Programme authorities shall monitor negative effects which could derive from the low success rate. See in particular the risk of discouraging potential applicants under SO 2.2. and 3.1</p>
<p>Programme procedures are mostly effective in targeting the programme objectives and envisaged results in terms of specific objectives and types of beneficiaries (including private partners). However, two of the seven specific objectives of the programme are poorly tackled, namely SO2.2 and SO3.1.</p>	<p>Programme authorities shall verify at which extent difficulties in attracting partners under SO 2.2. and SO 3.1 derive from the quality of the programme communication/support or whether instead from the fact that the two SOs do not reflect the current needs/challenges of the programme area.</p>
<p>Measures such as thematic terms of reference have proved successful in attracting proposals in areas of particular interest for the programme, e.g. addressing migration challenges and/or tackling the underachievement of some of its specific objectives.</p>	
<p>The 2-step application procedure is generally appreciated and preferred to the single-step procedure, both by applicants and by programme body members. Although perceived to be longer than a single step procedure, this is outweighed by its advantages: it is believed to keep low the administrative burden for applicants and improve the quality of proposals.</p> <p>Stakeholders consider the application procedure as time-consuming but (on average) not more than in other Interreg programmes. The call duration for the Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme is in line with other similar programmes.</p>	<p>Despite the increased administrative costs at programme level and length of the application procedure, the 2-step approach preferred to the single-step procedure and shall be maintained for regular calls.</p>



For programme bodies, the 2-step approach implies more complexity and higher administrative costs than in a single step application procedure.	
The limited space in some sections of the AF (work plan) constrains the applicants to vulgarise and shorten the content description.	Any modification to the AF (i.e. increase of the space available in some sections) shall take into account possible effects in terms of increase of the time needed to assess the proposal.
Application has been made completely paperless for applicants, through the use of the electronic monitoring system, eMS (developed by INTERACT).	
According to some of the applicants/beneficiaries interviewed national requirements represent a source of additional complexity. In particular it is often difficult for the LP to monitor the process of verification of all different national requirements.	Any effort to harmonise the approaches adopted in the different partner countries, and reducing the number of requirements, would lessen the complexity of the application process for applicants

Selection procedure

EQ 3: In how far are the project assessment criteria and procedures as well as selection process sound, transparent and fair, aiming at high quality projects to be funded?

Key findings	Recommendations
Assessment criteria are clear and coherent. Those concerning relevance of the partnership and transnationality though are perceived by applicants as difficult to tackle, partly due to lack of clarity in the programme expectations.	<p>Verify the possibility to further reduce the number of criteria adopted. Even if criteria are clear and coherent, the assessment process is still complex due to the important number of criteria to be considered.</p> <p>In the case of specific fields (e.g. innovation), thematic expertise would help the JS to assess the quality of projects proposals.</p>



EQ 4: How well is the programme explaining to applicants the results of project evaluation and selection (be it approval or rejection) and supporting them for further improvement (in case of resubmission)?

Key findings	Recommendations
<p>Applicants are generally satisfied with the explanations provided on the outcomes of the evaluation and selection procedure.</p> <p>However in some cases applicants lament that the level of information on the outcomes of the assessment and selection is not uniform among the different partner countries.</p> <p>The assessment report is the main source of information on the selection outcomes. Some applicants would like the assessment report to include the final score given to project proposals.</p>	<p>Applicants are generally satisfied but transparency could be enhanced. It appears of particular relevance that all applicants receive the same level of information on the outcomes of the assessment and selection.</p>
<p>Most NC/ACPs are satisfied with the transparency and clarity of the evaluation and selection process whereas others highlight the need for increased transparency of the selection procedure.</p>	

Functioning and coordination of programme bodies

EQ 5 : In how far are decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?

EQ 6 : How are the interactions between the programme bodies organised?

EQ 7 : Are their functions and responsibilities clearly established?

EQ 8: How effective is the coordination among these bodies?

EQ 9: How effective is the coordination with other Interreg programmes and EUSALP?

EQ 10: In which cases a better coordination is necessary?

Key findings	Recommendations
<p>Several programme bodies are involved and a number of steps foreseen in the evaluation procedure and in the follow-up of decision on</p>	<p>In the perspective of the elaboration of the future programme, programme authorities shall ensure the coordination with the initiatives of EUSALP and shall</p>



<p>selection.</p> <p>Cooperation among the programme bodies is considered as good by all stakeholders. Communication among national coordinators and between JS and ACP is satisfying.</p> <p>Coordination is perceived as effective but with room for improvement in the relation ACP-JS.</p> <p>The programme is well connected to relevant stakeholders of the cooperation area and outside (in particular with the key stakeholders involved in the EUSALP process).</p>	<p>stimulate opportunities for strategic discussions in the programme committee</p> <p>Analysing the needs for further improvements in the coordination between JS and ACP may be beneficial.</p>
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Annexes

1. List of acronyms
2. List of documents
3. Template of applicants survey
4. Template of interviews (NC, JS, MA)



1. List of acronyms

ACP	Alpine Space contact points
AF	Application form
CP	Cooperation programme document
eMS	Electronic monitoring system
EoI	Expression of interest
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESG	Evaluation steering group
ESIF	European structural and investment funds
ETC	European territorial cooperation
EU	European Union
EUSALP	European macro-regional strategy for the Alps
LA	Lead applicant
LP	Lead partner
MA	Managing authority
NCP	National contact points
PA	Partnership agreement
PC	Programme committee
PIH	Project implementation handbook
PP	Project partner
REGI Committee	European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development
SC	Subsidy contract
ToR	Terms of reference



2. List of documents

- 2003, Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning: Mid-term evaluation INTERREG IIIB Alpine Space programme 2000-2006, Final report.
- 2009, Alpine Space programme: Improving project quality, self-assessment report endorsed by the programme committee.
- 2014, T33: Ex-ante evaluation of the Alpine Space programme 2014-2020, Final report.
- 2014, Alpine Space 2014-2020, CCI 2014TC16RFTN001, cooperation programme document
- 2014, Interreg Europe 2014-2020, CCI 2014 TC 16 RFIR 001, cooperation programme document
- 2015, Alpine Space 2014-2020 programme, Study on private partners involvement.
- 2016, Interreg Central Europe “Application manual - Second call for proposals” (version 1 April 2016)
- 2016, Interreg Europe Programme manual, 13 December 2016 (version 4)
- 2017, Alpine Space programme Project implementation handbook
- 2017, Interreg North-West Europe 2014-2020 Programme manual, January 2017
- 2017, Spatial Foresight, Study on “Gold-Plating, in the European structural and investment funds” commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI Committee)



3. Template of applicants survey

Questions in white cells are relevant for applicants of both step 1 and 2. Questions in pink cells are for step 2 only. The survey is structured in blocks of questions. Each question should be read horizontally.

Legend:

- Only 1 answer
- 1 or several answers
- * Required answer

A. General questions			
Question	Choice		
1. What type of organisation do you represent? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local public authorities ○ Regional public authorities ○ National public authorities ○ Sectoral agencies ○ Infrastructure and public service providers ○ Interest groups including NGOs ○ Higher education and research centers ○ Education and training centers and schools ○ SMEs ○ Large enterprises ○ Business support organisations ○ EEIG –EGTCs ○ Other (please specify) 		
2. In which country is your organisation based? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Austria ○ France ○ Germany ○ Italy ○ Liechtenstein ○ Slovenia ○ Switzerland 		
3. Your organisation has submitted a proposal in call 2. Were you a lead partner (LP) or a project partner (PP) in the project proposal? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lead partner (LP) ○ Project partner (PP) 		
4. Was this the first time that your organisation applied for ERDF-funding of the Alpine Space programme? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No, I have already applied in the first call for proposals of Alpine Space 2014-2020 ○ No, I have already applied in Alpine Space 2007-2013 programming period ○ Yes, I had never applied to a European programme before ○ Yes, but I have applied to other Interreg programmes ○ Yes, but I have applied to other EU-funded programmes (COSME, LIFE, Horizon 2020) ○ Yes, but I have applied to other regional/national ERDF funding 		
5. Has your project been invited to the second step of call 2 of the Alpine Space programme 2014-2020? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes ○ No <p>If Yes: the survey will tackle both step 1 (white cells) and step 2 (pink cells) questions If no: survey will only tackle step 1 (white cells) questions</p>		
B. Support of programme documents and tools			
Question	Choice	Sub-question	Choice
6. Did you use documents published on the programme website "www.alpine-space.eu"? *	Yes	7. Which documents did you use? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Factsheets □ Guidance on Eol/AF □ eMS guidance
		8. Were the documents easy to find on the website? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not at all ○ Difficult ○ Easy ○ Very easy



		9. Did you find the information you were looking for? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
		10. How useful was the information in the programme documents for the setup of your project proposal? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
		11. Would you like to suggest any improvements to the programme documents?	
	No	12. Why did you not use the programme documents on the website? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Was not aware of them <input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
13. Did you use the project idea tool on the programme website "www.alpine-space.eu"? *	Yes	14. How did you use the project idea tool? *	<input type="checkbox"/> To post a project idea <input type="checkbox"/> To look for a project idea <input type="checkbox"/> To find out if a similar subject/project idea was already posted
		15. How useful was using the project idea tool for the preparation of your project proposal? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
	No	16. Why did you not use the project idea tool? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Was not aware of it <input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
17. Did you use the partner search tool on the programme website "www.alpine-space.eu"? *	Yes	18. How useful was using the partner search tool to build a good partnership? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
	No	19. Why did you not use the partner search tool? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Was not aware of it <input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
C. Support of programme bodies			
Question	Choice	Sub-question	Choice
20. When contacting the ACP of your country, what was their support most useful for? *			Matrix with: Relevance of project topic for the Alpine Space programme Partner search Information on national/regional policies National requirements Other Selection per topic from "very helpful" to "not helpful at all" + Not applicable 21. If other, please specify:
22. In how far did contacting the ACP of your country improve your project proposal? *			In step 1 – Expression of interest In step 2 – Application Form Selection per topic from "not at all" to "to a large degree" + Not applicable



23. Did you contact the ACP of <u>another</u> country in step 1? *	Yes	24. What was the support from this ACP most helpful for? *	Matrix with: Relevance of project topic for the Alpine Space programme Partner search Information on national/regional policies Other Selection per topic from “very helpful” to “not helpful at all” + Not applicable 25. If other, please specify:
		26. In how far did contacting the ACP of another country improve your project proposal? *	In step 1 – Expression of interest In step 2 – Application form Selection per topic from “not at all” to “to a large degree” + Not applicable
	No	27. Why did you not contact the ACP of another country? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
28. Did you contact the JS in step 1? *	Yes	29. What was the support provided by the JS most helpful for? *	Project theme Project objectives and outputs e-Monitoring System (eMS) Other Selection per topic from “very helpful” to “not helpful at all” + Not applicable 30. If other, please specify:
	No	31. Why did you not contact the JS in step 1? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
32. In step 2, the JS provides individual consultations to applicants (personal or phone meeting). What was the support provided by the JS most helpful for? *			Project theme Project objectives and outputs Work plan Project budget Other Selection per topic from “very helpful” to “not helpful at all” + Not applicable 33. If other, please specify:
34. In how far did the individual consultation with the JS improve your project proposal in step 2? *			<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree

D. Support from programme events

Question	Choice	Sub-question	Choice
35. Did you participate to the National Infoday of your country? *	Yes	36. How useful was participating to the National Infoday for the preparation of your project proposal? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
	No	37. Why did you not participate to the National Infoday? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time <input type="checkbox"/> Was not aware of it <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
38. Did you participate to the lead applicant seminar (between steps 1 and 2)? *	Yes	39. How useful was participating to the lead applicant seminar for the development of your project proposal? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> To a minor degree <input type="radio"/> To a sufficient degree <input type="radio"/> To a large degree
	No	40. Why did you not participate to the lead applicant seminar? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not find it useful <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time



		<input type="checkbox"/> Another project partner attended <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
E. Communication of selection results		
Question	Choice	
41. How did you learn about the results of the selection procedure? *	<input type="checkbox"/> I read the assessment report <input type="checkbox"/> I contacted the joint secretariat <input type="checkbox"/> I contacted the ACP of my country	
42. In your view, is the outcome of the step 1 assessment and selection process sufficiently explained to applicants? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all clear <input type="radio"/> Not very clearly explained <input type="radio"/> Rather clearly explained <input type="radio"/> Very clearly explained	
43. In your view, is the outcome of the step 2 assessment and selection process sufficiently explained to applicants? *	<input type="radio"/> Not at all clear <input type="radio"/> Not very clearly explained <input type="radio"/> Rather clearly explained <input type="radio"/> Very clearly explained	
F. General opinion		
Question	Statements / Further details	Choice
44. When developing your project proposal, which of the following was in your view most useful? *	Physical events and workshops, like infodays or the lead applicant seminar Bilateral meetings with the ACP of your country Contact with the ACP of another country Direct feedback to your questions and ideas via skype or telephone Individual consultations with the JS Other	Selection per topic from "not at all useful" to "very useful" + Not applicable 45. If other, please specify:
46. To which degree do you agree with the statements concerning the two-step application procedure? *	It increases the quality of my project proposal It decreases the overall workload in the application procedure It allows a better spread of the workload over time It is time-consuming. It takes a long time from the Eol submission to the final approval/rejection of the project It is complex I would have preferred a one-step application procedure	Selection per topic from "Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" + Not applicable 47. If you would have preferred a one-step application, please indicate why:
48. How much time (in man-days) did the preparation of step 1 application take your organisation (from the conception of the project idea to the submission of the expression of interest at step 1)? *		
49. How much time (in man-days) did the preparation for step 2 take your organisation (from notification of the programme committee for step 1 to the submission of the full application form for step 2)? *		
50. How would you rate the overall support provided by the Alpine Space programme in the application procedure? *		<input type="radio"/> Very poor <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Very good
51. What type of assistance did you find missing in the application procedure?		
52. Do you have a suggestion to improve the application procedure?		



4. Template of interviews

Questionnaire for the interviews to the national coordinators, with ACP

Evaluation criteria	Questions to national coordinators
Role of programme bodies	1. What are your views about the cooperation of different programme bodies (complementarity of roles, overlapping, efficient to deliver the good messages to the applicants) in the different phase of project generation (support for applicants, selection procedure) and programme implementation (monitoring, coordination)?
	2. What could be further improved regarding this coordination?
	3. What are your views about the coordination with EUSALP? How is the coordination with EUSALP ensured?
Support to applicants	4. What other type of support the programme should provide to applicants in order increase the quality of the projects (i.e. Factsheet No 0 "Quality requirements and contents", thematic workshops, InfoDays, online project idea community, feedback/support by ACPs and JS) and reduce the administrative burdens on beneficiaries (i.e. SCOs, applying HIT when relevant...)?
	5. Do you think that the 2 steps approach is effective in supporting applicants? If yes, in which sense? What are the advantages and disadvantages compared to the single step approach?
	6. What is your opinion regarding the duration of the project selection procedures?
	7. Are there areas for improvements? (i.e. more opportunities to directly discuss with the JS)
	8. What is your opinion about the support offered by the programme during the project implementation? What other type of support the programme could provide?
Transparency	9. Do you think that the selection criteria and more generally the selection procedure adopted by the programme enable to fund high quality projects?
	10. According to you, how well is the approach for explaining to the applicants the results of the project evaluation and selection (rejection or approval) and supporting them to improve their proposal (in case of resubmission)?
	11. Are there any areas of improvement?
Programme procedures and monitoring	12. In your opinion, are there any issues at FLCC level? (e.g. allowing effective verification of project progress and of the achievements, payment of beneficiaries in adequate time, reducing financial errors and de-commitment risks)
13. Are there any other issues that you wish to raise?	



Semi-structured interviews to managing authority and joint secretariat

Interview partner: managing authority	Interview partner: joint secretariat
<p>Scope: the interview collects evidences about the programme implementation, namely about the project cycle, the governance and role of programme bodies and the result orientation.</p>	<p>Scope: the interview collects evidences about the programme implementation, namely about the project cycle, the the Joint Secretariat and the result orientation.</p>
<p>1. Programme bodies and project generation, assessment, selection</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Do you think that specific roles of national contact points and Joint Secretariat in project generation, development and assessment are adequately and clearly defined? 1.2. Do you think there are additional needs in terms of skills and competences for project development, assessment and selection in the current programming period for the MC, JS and national contact points? If YES, which? 1.3. Do you think that some revisions would be necessary in the work of the programme bodies? 1.4. Can you identify any improvement / change compared to the previous programming period? 	<p>1. Programme bodies and project generation, assessment, selection</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Do you think that specific roles of national contact points and joint secretariat in project generation, development and assessment are adequately and clearly defined? 1.2. How is the workload comparable to the previous programme? Is it more (or less, or equally long) time consuming for the different bodies, in particular for JS? 1.3. From your experience, what are the main challenges of project applicants in project generation? 1.4. Do you think there are additional needs in terms of skills and competences for project development and assessment in the current programming period for the JS and national contact points? If YES, which? 1.5. Do you think that some revisions would be necessary in the work of the programme bodies? 1.6. Can you identify any improvement / change compared to the previous programming period?
<p>2. Programme bodies and general programme implementation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Do you think that the programme monitoring system is effectively working? 2.2. in terms of skills and competences to report on the project results for beneficiaries and JS? If YES, which? 2.3. How is the cooperation with other programme bodies (e.g. Audit and Certifying authority) going? Are there any issues at the moment? 2.4. Do you think that some revisions would be necessary in the work of the programme bodies? 2.5. Can you identify any improvement / change compared to the previous programming period? 	<p>2. Programme bodies and general programme implementation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Do you think that the programme monitoring system is effectively working? 2.2. How is the workload comparable to the previous programme in programme and project monitoring? Is it more (or less, or equally long) time consuming? 2.3. Do you think there are additional needs in terms of skills and competences to report on the project results for beneficiaries and JS? If YES, which? 2.4. From your experience, what are the main challenges of project beneficiaries in reporting? 2.5. How is the cooperation with other programme bodies (e.g. Audit and Certifying authority, Managing Authority) going? Are there any issues at the moment? 2.6. Do you think that some revisions would be necessary in the work of the programme bodies? 2.7. Can you identify any improvement / change compared to the previous programming period?
<p>3. Thematic focus, result orientation and EUSALP</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Are there any specific difficulty in the programme implementation across the priority axes (e.g. in terms of project generation, project assessment...)? 3.2. In your opinion, has the result orientation helped increase relevance and suitability of the projects and avoid low-quality projects? 3.3. Do you think that the programme could further exploit the EUSALP for project generation? If YES, how? 3.4. Do you think that it would be useful to have some further strategic discussion and guidance (by the MS) to gear the project generation towards more specific and strategic objectives for transnational cooperation in the area? 3.5. Do you think that some revisions (or at least debate on revisions) would be necessary (useful) in the programme strategy (e.g. for new emerging needs, avoiding decommitment, etc...)? 3.6. Do you think it could be useful to promote a more integrated discussion with other ETC and mainstream programmes in the area? 	<p>3. Thematic focus, result orientation and EUSALP</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Are there any specific difficulty in the programme implementation across the priority axes (e.g. in terms of project generation, project assessment...)? 3.2. From your experience, what are the main challenges for project applicants (e.g. making project results measurable)? 3.3. Do you think that the programme could further exploit the EUSALP for project generation? If YES, how? 3.4. Do you think that it would be useful to have some further strategic discussion and guidance (by the MS) to gear the project generation towards more specific and strategic objectives for transnational cooperation in the area? 3.5. Can you identify any improvement / change compared to the previous programming period?



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