

Interreg Alpine Space

Evaluation plan

14 | 20

European territorial cooperation





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Introduction

The present evaluation plan has been developed according to the provisions of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 (CPR, articles 50, 54, 56 and 114), Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 (ERDF Reg., article 14) and the Commission guidance documents on monitoring and evaluation¹ and on evaluation plans².

The evaluation plan of the Alpine Space programme has been drafted by the managing authority and the joint secretariat (MA/JS) with the support of external experts and submitted for approval to the programme committee (PC) in its meeting of 15-16 December 2015. Following its adoption, it will be sent to the European Commission (EC) for information through the SFC portal. The evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluations will be published on the programme website.

The evaluation plan sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the programme, taking into account lessons learnt from evaluations made in previous programming periods and the budgetary framework. The plan is meant to enable informed programme management and policy decisions to support the programme implementation and its result orientation. It sets out the framework to properly plan and implement quality programme evaluations with the aim to secure the programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

Progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities (when available) will be reported in the annual implementation report (AIR) for the years 2017, 2019 and the final AIR. By 31 December 2022, the MA will submit to the EC a report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programme period.

The planned evaluations are set out in the present paper, the description is indicative for evaluations planned beyond a 3 year period. New evaluation needs might occur during programme lifetime. Therefore, the evaluation plan will regularly be reviewed by the programme committee and it might be adapted according to the programme needs.

¹ Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation - European regional development fund and cohesion fund - Concepts and recommendations (March 2014):

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf

² Guidance Document of Evaluation Plans (February 2015):

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf



1. Evaluation activities

1.1 Objectives

The programme aims at fostering cooperation beyond borders to make the Alpine Space an even better place to live, work and invest in. To support these objectives and its result orientation, the programme will carry out a number of evaluations. These are aimed at improving the effectiveness and impact of the programme, strengthening stakeholders' involvement, ensuring a successful communication and reinforcing the programme capacity to bring a change in the cooperation area in full respect of its natural environment. The present evaluation plan sets the framework to properly plan, implement and follow-up these evaluations. It shall ensure that the evaluations provide appropriate input for programme management and policy decisions.

1.2 Type of evaluations

Based on the above mentioned objectives and in line with article 56 (3) of CPR³ and on the specific programme needs, three main types of evaluations are planned for 2014-2020:

- Evaluations on the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme;
- Impact evaluations on each of the specific objectives selected by the programme;
- Thematic evaluations.

More details on the evaluations and their timing are provided in section 3.

Evaluation activities will build on the outcomes of previous evaluations carried out by the programme in the periods 2000-2006 and 2007-2013:

- o **2000-2006, IIIB:** the programme contracted external experts for setting up the so-called "prospective study" and a midterm evaluation; an ex-post evaluation was also performed;
- o **2007-2013, IVB:** the programme carried out a study to explore the impact of programme and projects; commissioned experts to evaluate the communication plan; performed a critical self-reflection (quality process). Furthermore, the programme carried out an in-depth study on the mega-

³ The article foresees that 'During the programming period, the managing authority shall ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess **effectiveness, efficiency and impact**, are carried out for each programme on the basis of the plan and that each evaluation is subject to appropriate follow-up in accordance with the Fund-specific rules. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority'.



trends and needs in the area ([Strategy Development for the Alpine Space](#) – SDP), as preparation for the period 2014-2020. This study provided: recommendations for policies to pursue selected strategic objectives in the Alpine Space, proposals for overcoming barriers to achieving those objectives, specific starting points for working on and contributing to a macro-regional strategy.

With the aim of ensuring their quality and optimising the evaluation efforts and costs, synergy among different types of evaluations will be promoted as much as possible, in particular between those tackling efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

2. Coordination and implementation

2.1 Roles and responsibilities

The **PC, representing the programme partners, has a steering and deciding role** as regards the development and implementation of the evaluation plan. It examines and approves the evaluation plan and any of its amendments (article 110 (2) of CPR). The PC reviews the plan on a regular basis and at least annually, in view of ensuring that emerging needs in terms of evaluation activities are reflected in the plan. The PC also examines the progress made in the implementation of the plan and the follow up given to the findings of the evaluations (article 110 (1) (b) CPR). The review of the evaluation plan could be combined with the approval of the annual implementation report in which progress made in implementing the evaluation plan will be reported.

In line with the “European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds” (article 16 (1) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014) and with the above mentioned guidance documents of the EC on evaluation and in view of supporting the PC, the PC has agreed to establish a **steering group (SG)** which fulfils the following functions:

- o representing the programme stakeholders and allowing their participation in the implementation of the evaluation plan,
- o providing expertise to support the implementation of such a plan, e.g. providing input on the evaluation questions and on the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts; facilitating whenever possible access to information, data and/or data sources useful for the evaluations; reviewing the evaluations reports; proposing and monitoring of follow-up measures based on evaluation findings.



To ensure work efficiency the SG is composed by:

- the chair of the PC,
- 1 representative nominated by each Partner State,
- 1 representative of the MA,
- 1 representative of the JS,
- the EC is welcome to participate in the SG.

Depending on the different phases of the programme life cycle, different stakeholders may be invited as guests to the SG. Since a close interrelation with the PC is ensured by the presence of PC chair, the MA and JS in the SG, the representatives of Partner States are whenever possible other than the PC members.

Those representatives may be from:

- administrations,
- economic and social partners,
- civil society / third sector,
- bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination,
- other.

The SG members should bring in experience and expertise in the policy fields tackled by the programme and by the planned evaluations, knowledge of European territorial cooperation (expertise in evaluation will be provided by the evaluation experts specifically procured).

The SG will normally meet once per year. An additional meeting might be necessary based on specific needs (e.g. defining the ToR for the contracting of experts or when evaluations are carried out).

The communication flow between SG and PC will be ensured by MA/JS (e.g. through sending the minutes of its meetings to the PC and informing the SG on decisions taken by the PC).

The **MA** and **JS** will carry out all activities related to the set up and implementation of the evaluation plan. These comprise activities related to convening, preparation and follow up of SG and PC meetings; contracting, coordination and quality control with/of external experts; coordination with EC, EUSALP, INTERACT, Interreg programmes and others; ensuring information flow between SG and PC, etc.

2.2 Synergy with other programmes and initiatives

The programme welcomes and will promote whenever possible synergy and collaborations with EUSALP, INTERACT, ESPON, other Interreg and mainstream programmes as well as other institutions from the



cooperation area carrying out evaluations, in view of widening the evaluation perspective, enriching results of the evaluation activities and avoiding duplications.

2.3 Source of evaluation expertise

Article 54 (3) of the CPR regulation states that evaluations are to be carried out by experts (internal or external) that are functionally independent from the authorities responsible for programme implementation. The structure of the MA and JS does not foresee separate departments/units dealing with evaluation matters and therefore such functional independency cannot be ensured. Still, the programme intends to guarantee an efficient use of the human and financial resources allocated to evaluation activities as well as to ensure ownership of such activities from the programme. Therefore, a mixed approach of internal and external expertise will be used.

As a general rule, evaluations will be carried out by external experts especially when complex issues such as impact evaluations are concerned and when complex methodologies or data collection have to be applied and carried out. The JS will provide them with information and input from the monitoring of the approved projects, programme developments and ongoing discussions. Data collection will be completed by the experts whenever necessary (e.g. through surveys).

For the evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency and the communication strategy, MA/JS will provide the main data and reference analysis and then external experts will review them (see also section 2.7 below).

2.4 Data collection and monitoring system

The programme recognises the importance of setting up a well-functioning monitoring system, at an early stage. The main responsibility for data collection belongs to MA/JS (top-down approach). This will guarantee an efficient use of financial resources (compared to the full externalisation of these tasks) as well as homogeneity and consistency of the methodology used.

The primary source of information for evaluations will be represented by the monitoring of the approved projects through their regular reporting (status/progress reports). Project's reports will be designed as far as possible to support the programme evaluations. Therefore, in addition to programme's indicators, the reports may include additional indicators (e.g. for environmental evaluations, indicators may be integrated following the recommendations of the strategic environmental assessment report). Evaluation experts may be asked to support the programme in the definition of these additional indicators. Additionally, they will have an "on demand" role and will collect qualitative information through e.g. surveys or case studies to complement data.



To allow gathering richer information at programme level and also better reaching local and regional stakeholders, this approach will be combined whenever possible with a bottom-up one, i.e. through the involvement of project partners in the collection of data. Projects will be requested to share information concerning the “quality” of their intervention, the target groups reached, etc. They will be supported by the MA/JS and the evaluation experts in this “self-assessment exercise” through capacity building activities and tools to accompany evaluation at project level. The MA/JS will play a role of operational coordination and supervising the correct flow of information. The evaluation experts will be in charge of the methodological and quality aspects. They will support the evaluation capacity building process, e.g. by organising peer reviewing, specific training among the projects, elaborating guidance, aggregating the findings of the project evaluation, providing meta-evaluation and making in depth analyses when necessary.

Experts that will be contracted for evaluations will be asked to propose adequate methodologies for data collection and analysis such as case studies, desk research, interviews, etc.

2.5 Involvement of stakeholders

In compliance to the principle of partnership, the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Alpine Space cooperation programme (CP), the programme promotes the engagement of its stakeholders in the design and implementation of the plan whenever possible. As mentioned above, the programme seeks the contribution of its stakeholders to the tasks and meetings of the evaluation SG. Building on the experience on the stakeholders’ dialogue launched for the SDP and as set out in the programme’s communication strategy, the programme will also explore other forms of consultation and exchange. Finally, stakeholders will be the target of the programme’s dissemination and communication activities with regard to the evaluation results.

2.6 Dissemination of evaluation results

Information on the evaluation plan as well as the evaluation reports will be published on the programme website. In addition, the programme will actively promote the findings of evaluations through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. through thematic workshops for beneficiaries, policy makers and other stakeholders; the use of social media and community development, whenever relevant) as they are foreseen in the communication strategy, also in order to strengthen the evaluation capacity within the relevant stakeholders.



2.7 Quality management

To ensure quality of programme evaluations, adequate time will be foreseen to plan and procure evaluations. For the latter, specific criteria will be defined in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts. They will relate in particular to competencies and expertise in evaluation, with specific regard to Interreg programmes. Evaluators will be required to use a sound methodology (EVALSED or similar) in the performance of their tasks. They will also be required to produce inception, interim and final reports on the evaluations carried out. MA/JS will be responsible for quality control of the outsourced evaluation activities.

For those cases (effectiveness, efficiency, communication strategy) where the MA/JS provide main data and a reference analysis, the external evaluators will be in charge of reviewing and validating the evaluation concept (planned evaluation questions, methodology and data) and the results of the evaluations (to verify if conclusions are logic and objective).

The SG will be involved in the definition of the ToR for the procurement of external experts and in the design of the evaluation concept for the evaluations carried out by MA/JS staff; will review all evaluation reports; will accompany and monitor the implementation of follow-up measures defined as a result of evaluations; will report to the PC through the MA/JS.

The PC will be regularly informed of progress on evaluation activities, their outcomes and will also receive evaluation reports.

2.8 Human and financial resources

The head of the MA and one staff member of the JS are engaged in the preparation and implementation of the plan. Additional staff members of MA and JS will be involved in the evaluations on demand. The JS communication officer will contribute to the evaluation of the communication strategy and will also ensure the communication of the outcomes of programme evaluations.

To ensure good knowledge of qualitative, quantitative evaluation methodologies and sound planning and managing of evaluations MA/JS staff will regularly take part in trainings offered, especially by INTERACT, carry out self-studies and exchange with other Interreg programmes.

Based on the estimated evaluation needs and the overall budget available from the technical assistance budget (TA) for external expertise, a maximum amount of EUR 250,000 is reserved for evaluations in the period 2014-2020.



3. Planned evaluations and timing

All impact evaluations will be conducted through a theory-based evaluation in order to assess to what extent (why and how) an intervention has produced (intended or unintended) effects. Evaluators may make use of interviews, desk researches, benchmarking with other programmes as well as surveys and analysis of case studies. Depending on the specific type and topic of each evaluation, the relevant method and data requirements will be selected. Elements will be provided in the terms of reference for the selection of the evaluation experts whereas it will be up to the bidders to propose the most suitable evaluation method and data requirements.

The programme evaluation activities shall answer questions such as the following ones. The questions listed below are indicative. They will be combined with each other, reformulated or further specified in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts or in the concept description for the evaluations carried out internally by MA/JS with the necessary external support.

Efficiency and effectiveness of programme procedures

- Are the phases from project generation to contracting as well as project monitoring efficient? What can be improved (identify bottle-necks and lessons learnt)?
- Is the monitoring system effective in measuring the targeted results and outputs?

Effectiveness, partnership and stakeholders' involvement

- Has the specific objective reached its target or is it on a good way to do so?
- Has the programme succeeded in involving its stakeholders and in particular policy relevant partners and private partners?
- How far has the programme managed to attract new, relevant partners?
- What are the features of the partnerships (location within the Partner States, type of partner, etc.)?
- Did the project observers benefit from their involvement in the projects and vice versa?
- Which obstacles have been identified to the participation of stakeholders to the programme and which improvements in the programme management are deemed necessary based on the evaluation findings (e.g. reducing administrative burden, simplifying programme procedures)?

Impact evaluation of each specific objective

- What has changed in the cooperation area, in terms of quality of governance, integration of policies, sustainable economic development, etc.?



- How has the programme contributed to such change and how are the effects of the programme distributed in the alpine territory (metropolises, cities, stable/growing/declining/shrinking rural areas, tourism areas)?
- What continued interventions would be needed in this field?
- How has the priority and/or specific objective contributed to wider policy objectives, in particular those of EUSALP (in terms of contribution to the strategy and mutual benefit), Europe2020, territorial agenda, the horizontal principles defined by the programme and European Commission (non-discrimination, sustainable development, etc.) or aspects such as the quality of life of citizens?

Evaluation of the Communication strategy

- Have programme bodies been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the programme area?
- Have the programme communication measures reached the relevant target groups efficiently?
- Has the programme contributed to increase the capacity of projects to communicate their own achievements?
- Has the programme raised awareness about its activities and achievements?
- Does the communication strategy need to be updated for the remaining programme period based on the evaluation findings?

Compliance with the strategic environmental assessment

- Are environmental aspects sufficiently taken into account in the phases of project evaluation and selection? Do the approved projects comply with the criteria of the strategic environmental assessment and with the typology and level of the impact identified?
- Is there the need for other environmental indicators to be included in the monitoring and which?

The timing for evaluations will be shaped according to the different programme implementation phases. Evaluations aiming at appraising programme efficiency and effectiveness will be carried out at an earlier stage than impact evaluations so that the findings of evaluations can still be taken on board and be used to improve or reorient where necessary the programme approach and practices. Impact evaluations will be carried out at a time when a critical mass of approved projects has realised first results.

For instance:

- 2017-2018: evaluation on programme effectiveness (aligned with the EUSALP evaluation report) will also include some preliminary findings on the potential bottlenecks and opportunities in the intervention logic of the programme, which may affect the impact evaluation;



- 2019-2020: a first (preliminary) impact evaluation will be carried out. Projects from call 1 and 2 will be finalised or close to finalisation and projects from other calls will have started their implementation. There will be sufficient elements for a preliminary evaluation of their contribution to the programme objectives;
- 2022: it can be assumed that all calls will have been launched, most projects will have reported their final activities and a solid set of data and information will be available to evaluate the impact of the programme.

The timing for evaluations will also take into account the EC monitoring requirements. Progress in the implementation of the plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities (when available) will be reported in the AIR submitted in 2018, 2020 and 2023 (covering the previous year of implementation). The findings of all evaluations carried out during the programme period will be reported by 31 December 2022.

In addition in 2018, 2020 and 2023, the programme is required to monitor its result indicators against the baseline included in the CP. In view of obtaining comparable data, surveys will be addressed as much as possible to the same respondents (persons or administrations/departments) of the questionnaire used for the baseline. To ensure efficiency, impact evaluations of the SOs will include the monitoring of result indicators.

The planned evaluations and the relevant timing are listed below.

Evaluations	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
					AIR	* Monit results			AIR	* Monit results					AIR	* Monit results
Efficiency of programme																
Effectiveness, partnership, stakeholders involvement																
Impact of SOs						*				*						*
Comm. strategy																
SEA compliance							**									

*Monitoring of result indicators (EU requirement)

**Mid-term evaluation as per SEA-report. Monitoring requirements from SEA Directive 2001/42/CE integrated in overall monitoring.



List of abbreviations

AIR	Annual implementation report
CP	Cooperation programme
EC	European Commission
EUSALP	European strategy for the Alpine region
JS	Joint secretariat
MA	Managing authority
PC	Programme committee
SFC	System for fund management in the European Union
SDP	Strategy development project
SG	Steering group
SO	Specific objective
TA	Technical assistance
ToR	Terms of reference