



Interact III

Programme Guide 2014-2020

Version 1.2 April 2016

List of factsheets

Factsheet No 1: Joint HR Policy

Factsheet No 2: Coordination

Factsheet No 3: Programme-level rules on eligibility of expenditure

Factsheet No 4: Budget principles for priority axis 1 Service delivery

Factsheet No 5: Performance monitoring

Factsheet No 6: Communication Strategy

Acronyms and abbreviations

CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
COESIF	Coordination Committee for European Structural and Investment Funds
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013)
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
DG REGIO	European Commission Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy
EC	European Commission
EGESIF	Group of experts in Structural and Investment Funds
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
eMS	electronic Monitoring System
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERT/CDB	Event Registration Tool/Contact Database
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
HIT	Harmonised Implementation Tools
HR	Human Resources
IO	Interact Office
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IS	Interact Secretariat
IT	Information Technology
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JAWP	Joint Annual Work Plan
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MAWP	Multi Annual Work Programme
MC	Monitoring Committee
PA	Priority Axis
PC	Programming Committee
PEST	Political, Economic, Social and Technological (analysis)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (analysis)
TA	Technical Assistance
VAT	Value Added Tax

Objectives of the Programme Guide

This document shall complement the Multi Annual Work Programme, which will be guiding the team how to jointly delivery the expected results, as the cooperation within the Interact Offices (IOs), Managing Authority (MA) and Interact Secretariat (IS) is the key success factor for the efficient delivery of the Programme.

The Programme Guide aims to provide support for decisions on how to work together and for reaching the expected outputs and results. It shall establish shared understanding on the basic areas of cooperation within the Interact Programme, especially the Programme values, which shall form the basis for the work in the team during the next programme period.

The Programme Guide is a living document, reflecting the evolution of the Programme and the new challenges that may occur during the implementation in the following years. The drafters therefore decided to compile this Guide as a collection of factsheets, which can be updated individually, based on the actual need.

Factsheet No 1.

Joint HR Policy

1 Objectives

The objectives of the Joint HR Policy in Interact III are the following:

- To provide an environment for our staff which is conducive for their long-term motivation, dedication, and appreciation for their work, and thus creates ownership for the implementation of Interact III strategy;
- To ensure the tool to adequately plan and to ensure that the work load requirements and Interact human resources are balanced and correspond, to ensure the team motivation and commitment to deliver the services;
- To have a coherent approach regarding the most relevant HR related issues, such as working conditions and acknowledgement of the work;
- To support the systematic analysis of development needs regarding the requests by our stakeholders;
- To ensure the active dialogue and transparent forum for discussion between Interact III actors and the hosting institutions regarding the HR issues with the aim to ensure similar working conditions in each Interact Office (IO) to the extent possible;
- To ensure that the competencies and expertise regarding the positions within Interact are mapped and described transparently, to ensure the effective service delivery of the Interact Programme;
- To ensure the multi-cultural coverage in a way which benefits the service provision for the territorial cooperation, and ensures the deep understanding of the essence of cooperation.

2 Interact Competency Framework

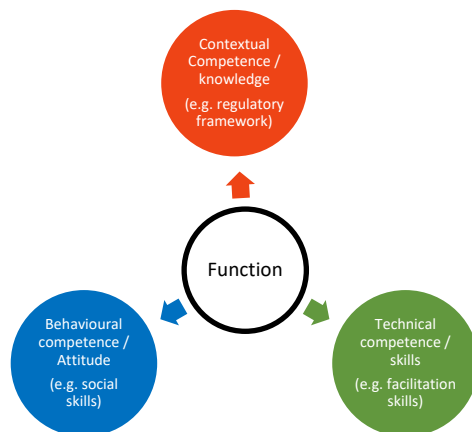
Main objective for the framework is to understand what kind of competences are needed in order to deliver the strategy.

Interact III will use the competency framework, e.g.:

- As a tool for staff motivation;
- In order to identify, understand and address gaps of competences in the team;
- To support staff development opportunities, for example in addressing internal learning and mentoring opportunities;
- To help understand which are Interact's strengths, and where our uniqueness lies;
- To help understand risks (i.e. if we lose unique competence) and consider contingences;
- To support the geographical location of human resources according to the agreed Interact service delivery;
- To support Coordinators of Interact Offices and Head of Interact MA/IS in fulfilling their tasks and responsibilities in HR management.

The Competency Framework concept introduces the competency maps, which are representative for the whole function; they are not person specific. The competency maps can be used to understand which are the core competencies (general set of knowledge/skills) that each member of the group (function) needs to possess and which are the specific competencies (variety of individual skills). This can be illustrated with the following picture, where the competencies are clustered under three categories: Contextual Competences, Technical Competencies and Behavioural Competences.

Figure 1. Core competences clustered



Competence mapping can be used for example as a tool for:

- Risk analysis (to analyse the competencies required for the Interact service delivery and how to address the risk if it will be realized);
- Recruitment (to support the process and to harmonize the competencies within Interact);
- Annual appraisal discussions with all the team members.

Interact III will have the following staff functions, and competency maps correspondingly for each of the function. There is the plan to develop maps for the following functions: Coordinators (including MA), Programme Management (Content), Programme Management (Finance), Communication and Information, IT/Information, Administration, and Quality.

Mapping of the competencies required will as well facilitate and harmonize recruitment processes, carried out in each Interact Office and by hosting institutions according to the local requirements. Competency Framework, and description of the positions (based on position-driven competence requirements) will ensure the transparency of the recruitment process, it should also direct to the balanced staffing between the Interact Offices.

3 Recruitment Policy

Due to the Interact de-centralised service delivery structure, the MA/IS and four Interact Offices are operating in different administrative, legal and cultural environments. This evidently affects the recruitment processes concerning the administrative procedures and practicalities regarding the recruitment process as such.

However, as part of Interact joint HR Policy, the recruitments are respecting the objectives set for the Interact HR Policy.

Interact Offices will follow the HR recruitment process description to the extent possible. The HR recruitment process will clarify the stages of the process and the responsible person(s) for the process, which will ensure the harmonized and transparent horizontal approach.

In order to assure stability and continuity within the Managing Authority, in case of change of key staff and in particular of the head of the Managing Authority, the Bratislava Self Governing Region shall perform a transparent assessment (the advantages and possible threats of this change) and consult with the Troika members¹.

¹ Troika members are: the current, the previous and the following Member State presiding the Council of the European Union.

4 Development Policy

It is of utmost importance that the Interact team members are constantly developing their competencies further to be able to respond to the needs of the environment Interact is operating in, and targeting its services for the extremely interesting, innovative but challenging area of cooperation and territorial development.

The development of competencies will be tackled with various processes and tools, e.g. trainings organized by external organisations and participation in Interact internal working groups (for peer-to-peer learning). In addition, the tutoring/mentoring practice will be developed further within Interact III.

Annual appraisal discussions which are held between each individual team member and respective Coordinator are an essential and valuable opportunity to discover and discuss the development needs, and the further development of competencies, followed by concrete actions and tools to reach the objective set jointly. The discussions and joint agreements will be followed-up. For the Coordinators the similar forum needs to be ensured by the hosting institution.

5 Career Development

As Interact has a flat organizational hierarchy, the opportunities for career advancement in the traditional sense are limited.

We would like to secure an environment conducive to continuous development of the individual and the team as a whole. As a general principle, tasks and responsibilities of individual team members shall be assigned and working conditions shall take the level of seniority into account. For example in Interact we:

- Offer opportunities for continuous learning by providing training opportunities for the team members, but also encouraging mentoring practice especially for new staff members, shadowing (e.g. experienced staff working closely with an expert to deepen competency) and internal peer learning;
- Provide personal autonomy and initiative;
- Support innovation - new ideas are welcomed;
- Create internal networks.

6 Employer Brand

Interact is aiming to build an attractive Employer Brand to be competitive among other Programmes and organisations. The main aim is to build the Interact team, which can actively contribute to the successful implementation of the Programme. We aim for that by offering interesting and stimulating working environment, within the team of highly skilled and experienced colleagues in the field of territorial cooperation.

7 Responsibility for HR Policy

Responsibility of the HR Policy in the MA/IS and individual Interact Offices falls on Head of MA and respective Interact Office Coordinator. Quality Manager has the support and advisory role. For example the responsibility on specific trainings and capacity building in each Interact Office is the responsibility of the Coordinator, whereas the horizontal trainings for the whole Interact team will be discussed and agreed jointly with the Head of MA.

Regarding the responsibilities, national labour laws applicable in respective Interact Offices and MA needs to be taken into account.

As a general principle, beneficiaries provide coordinators with a sufficient delegation of powers, to be able to manage their teams and implement the Interact Multi Annual Work Programme (MAWP) and Joint Annual Work Plans (JAWPs).

Factsheet No 2.

Coordination

The Interact Programme is delivered in a decentralised structure with four Interact Offices, Interact Secretariat and the Managing Authority, in five different locations. It is important that the benefit of the geographical closeness to our target groups is not at the same time a hindrance to a coordinated service delivery. This factsheet describes the mechanisms of coordination.

Interact team is composed of highly qualified and motivated individuals, committed for cooperation, who are the biggest asset of the Programme. It is believed that management by values, where the team is given the purpose (vision and mission), the mechanisms to establish priorities (long term strategy objectives) and the tools for implementation (structure and values) is the most effective way of ensuring that such team works towards the same direction and for the same objectives. Alignment at this level is considered to be much more efficient than a system only based on ex-post monitoring and enforcement of compliance.

The dispersed location poses a challenge in terms of developing common understanding of ways of working, which would lead to the best quality of our products and services. Therefore the setup of several horizontal working groups with staff coming from different Interact Offices and the solid and consolidated Coordination Board ensures the efficiency of the Programme's daily work. In fact, the effectiveness of centralised monitoring in such a quality system may be questionable as well. This is the reason why a joint quality strategy is established. It is built around jointly developed system of processes, which are believed to ensure the joint approach and the best quality. At the same time the ownership for quality is established with each member of the team, while the quality manager and each single coordinator is acting as facilitators and motivators for continuous improvement.

In order to communicate with our stakeholders in a structured way, a joint communication strategy, supporting the achievement of the expected results of the Interact programme, is established. It is built around the corporate identity with joint logo, slogan, consistent presentation of Interact as one programme and long-term communication activity plan. At the same time the ownership for communication is established with each member of the team, while the communication manager is acting as a facilitator, supporting the team in respecting the corporate identity.

1 Interact Values

The following values have been developed by the Interact team. Management by values can only work if all members of the organisation accept and believe in them. This means that changes may occur, are even welcome and should be accepted.

- **Cooperation**

We believe our diversities make us strong, enabling us to create solutions that benefit our partners.

We trust and respect each other and our wish to contribute to the team.

- **Service Excellence**

We are proud of our achievements and the high quality of our work.

We believe our services must deliver tailored-made added value to each of our users, and that we achieve this by being agile, flexible and customer-oriented.

We work continuously to provide services that greatly benefit our users, give them value for money, and specifically meet their needs.

We aim to deliver an exceptional experience to each user, by always being service-minded, solution-oriented and reliable.

We are at the forefront in our field of our expertise, and are always ready for new challenges.

- **Integrity**

We take responsibility for each other and our partners, and we ensure our actions - internal and external - are ethical and in line with our values of cooperation and service excellence.

The three values are the pillars of Interact culture. Coordinators individually and as a group must be at the forefront of actively using and promoting these values within the Offices and across the team. Each team member shall contribute to, as well as can expect and demand that all actions of Interact are in line with these values.

2 Quality strategy

2.1 Quality objectives for Interact

The following objectives set the quality standard for Interact as an organization:

- Work proactively with our stakeholders in order to tailor our services to their existing and emerging needs (this can be reflected, amongst other methods, through performing on-going needs identification, perform satisfaction surveys against needs expressed, timely delivery of services, etc.);
- Promote a culture of continuous development of our staff in order to develop and maintain their professional skills and self-esteem (this can be reflected, amongst other methods, through staff developmental needs assessment, internal elaboration of competence developmental paths, staff competency framework elaboration, creation of learning/knowledge sharing feedback loops, etc.);
- Continuously analyse the value we have created for our stakeholders reflected in their practices and ways of working (this can be reflected, amongst other methods, through the development/testing of an evaluation methodology linking the delivery of our services to behavioural/organisational changes for our stakeholders as a result of our services, etc.).

The quality objectives defined for Interact reflect on the following principles:

- We will achieve a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements and expectations of our stakeholders towards Interact;
- We will design our services around these requirements and expectations;
- We will deliver our services to meet our stakeholders requirements and expectations in full, as well as we may anticipate some requirements to enhance efficiency, which have not yet being expressed;
- We will determine the extent to which our services have met stakeholder requirements and expectations (i.e. that we got things right).

2.2 Defining Interact's service

In Interact we define service as an experience that provides to our stakeholders a benefit of a high quality standard, which is bespoke, relevant, and timely. We assure the quality of our service by building evaluation into our processes.

- Bespoke we define as: Tailor-made to the existing/emerging needs of our stakeholders in order to ensure that they gain the maximum possible benefit from our services.
- Relevant we define as: Our services are developed with a thorough knowledge of the working environment of the programmes. Our staff knows the programmes and the environment in which they operate - this is reflected in our services and we are a trusted source of service for Interreg programmes.

- Timely we define as: A match between service delivery and need.

2.3 Resources

2.3.1 Main resources in Interact that will facilitate the implementation of the strategy

The overall responsibility for implementation of the strategy is within the Managing Authority for Interact III and the Interact Office Coordinators. Specific resources to facilitate the strategy are provided to the Quality Manager (and supported by the Quality Team). The quality of our services is the responsibility of all Interact staff engaged in the design, planning and delivery of our services and considerations shall be reflected in each Interact team member job specification.

2.4 The way to get there – how will we achieve our quality objectives

The following main steps shall guide the delivery of the strategy.

Table 1. Main steps of the quality strategy

Steps	Actions (examples)
We work together with clear and simple processes which are underpinned (where necessary) by short/clear guidance, thus help us deliver our service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process design (including supporting documents where necessary)
Ownership for the processes shall be created across Interact's team - through training and engagement. It is important that we all recognize our practices in the processes, that they are clear and transparent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the whole team to process design outcome • Deployment of processes across Interact
If the team owns the processes, they can also recognize risks associated and suggest improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk definition and review • Annual process review and suggestions for improvement
We rely on a team of highly qualified professionals, whose competences are continuously developed to reflect (and even anticipate) stakeholder needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency framework development • Identification of Interact team learning needs
It is important that we all associate with an organizational culture where everyone takes responsibility of the quality of personal and team work/performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer review within Interact • Observation • Feedback (internal and external)
It is equally important that we learn to listen to each other and to our stakeholders - to capture, share and make best use of new learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to the box above
Creating an understanding of how/whether our services have lead to changes in our stakeholder organizations will provide useful evidence of the value of our work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation framework and testing of the framework, linked to behaviour/organisational changes of our stakeholders

2.5 Our commitment to achieving our quality objectives

The quality strategy has been developed by the INTERACT II Coordinators Group and the Coordination Board members are totally committed to promoting and communicating this strategy throughout Interact, providing adequate resources to achieve success and to ensuring that our strategy delivers the quality objectives we have set ourselves.

3 Processes

The quality strategy is an integrated component of Interact's management system, which implies definition of our processes under the following subheadings.

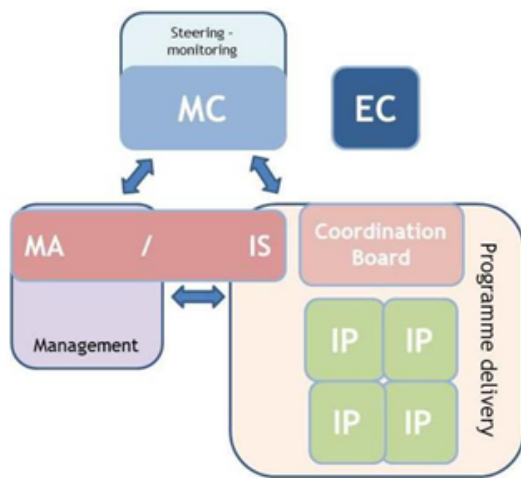
Table 2. Interact processes

Processes for managing our business	Processes for delivering our service	Processes supporting the delivery of our service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and monitoring the JAWP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Needs Assessment Development of the JAWP Coordination of internal working groups in Interact Decision making in the Coordination Board HR management and development HR recruitment key steps, in compliance with national rules Quality Assurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event management Network management Interact long-term tools Short term tools in Interact (publications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing learning in Interact Interact IT tools (internal) Event organisation External experts (internal exchange on good practices in Interact, in compliance with national rules)

It is believed that these processes will ensure most effective and efficient delivery of the programme in a coordinated way.

4 Management and delivery structure²

Figure 1. Management and delivery structure of Interact



The Managing Authority, supported by the Interact Secretariat is responsible for managing the Programme according to the CPR, ERDF and ETC Regulations. Interact Offices are beneficiaries acting as Programme implementation bodies. A coordination board ('Coordination Board'), composed of the Coordinators of the Interact Offices / representatives of hosting institutions, MA and IS representative, chaired by the Interact Offices of rotational basis, serves as the means to assure the fulfilment of the joint activities and responsibilities in the service delivery. The hosting institutions can delegate their tasks to the relevant Interact Office coordinators.

A single programme implementation partnership with clear arrangements among partners makes the structure lighter and more stable and makes separate central coordination units unnecessary. The Coordination Board is responsible for coordination of the service delivery (coordinating the implementation of operations).

The MC keeps the responsibility of ensuring the strategic direction of the Programme. At the same time, MA keeps core Programme management tasks, while Interact Offices bear more responsibility both for the services they deliver and for fulfilling tasks for the benefit of all other bodies (horizontal tasks). Joint working groups of staff members from all Interact Offices with clear leadership/responsibility (via specific split of tasks among the Interact Offices) assure the same level of service in all zones (see below). The Coordination Board is accountable to the MA - the body responsible for managing the Programme - and, while the MA reports to the MC regularly on progress of the Programme, the Coordination Board may provide to the MC detailed information of development of new products, tools, activities and service delivery.

According to the nature of the Programme (no projects), there is no need of providing information and assistance to beneficiaries and the small Interact Secretariat unit, created within the MA, mainly assists MA and MC with the implementation of the programme activities. Interact Secretariat is responsible for providing the (IT) infrastructure for Interact Offices for the purpose of coordination, reporting and planning. The IS is also responsible for compiling the Interact Offices inputs into the Programme level documents.

MA still takes legal responsibility towards the European Commission and the Member States for the implementation of the Programme.

The Coordination Board is a Programme structure without any legal personality, nor can be called a Programme body. It is an advisory and coordination body.

² The content of this factsheet was agreed by the representatives of the Interact participating countries at the 3rd Interact III Programming Committee Meeting on 3 April 2014 in Vilnius.

Horizontal activities are partially shifted from IS to the Interact Offices (e.g. communication activities and quality management) with direct accountability to the MA (see below).

To ensure the international dimension of the programme, continuity and political autonomy from the respective hosting institutions, all international MA/IS and all Interact Offices staff shall be recruited, managed (i.e. performance evaluation and training) in line with procedures, described in implementing documents (see fact sheet No. 1 on human resources).

4.1 Coordination Board working principles

Members of the Coordination Board are the representatives of the beneficiaries (hosting institutions or Coordinators entrusted by their respective hosting institution).

The MA ensures that the Coordination Board implements the MC decisions regarding activities. The Coordination Board is responsible for ensuring that overall quality standards of the Programme are followed as well.

In order to ensure transparency, involvement and information flow between the Programme bodies, MA participates at the Coordination Board meetings, having a monitoring function and ensuring that decisions of the MC are implemented. Chairing is on a rotational basis by one of the Interact Offices, while the Interact Secretariat should be assisting the chair in organizing and following up on meetings. MA remains out of the decisions on the day-to-day service delivery activities implementation. MC members and the Commission representative can participate, if so requested.

The basic working principles within the Coordination Board are as follows:

- Based on the MC decision on strategic goals, the Coordination Board implements operational steering of the Programme in the field of the service delivery.
- The Coordination Board, chaired by the respective Interact Office on rotational basis, elaborates, together with the working groups and the MA, service delivery activities on Programme level and submits its proposal via the MA to the MC (mainly through the Joint Annual Work Plans). Interact Secretariat assists the chair in organising and following up on the meetings.
- The mandate and responsibility of the Coordination Board is clearly defined by the MC in order to allow for smooth implementation of the Programme.
- The Coordination Board coordinates implementation of service delivery activities and progress towards implementation of the strategy on regular basis (taking into account balance between horizontal and regional approach, Quality Assurance, meeting the objectives etc.) and reports to the MA and MC. In order to have regular feedback on the implementation of JAWP activities, the MA participates at the Coordination Board meetings, having a monitoring function and ensuring that decisions of the MC are implemented. MA remains out of the decisions on day-to-day activities implementation. In case of disagreement on single specific activities (e.g. a single seminar, non-strategic activity), which are still in line with the general mandate, strategy of the Programme and joint annual work plan, dissenting members of the Coordination Board can abstain but do not block the implementation of the respective activity. The MC is informed about alternative proposals or views on strategic issues, if relevant.
- The Coordination Board assures the implementation of the joint Programme identity.
- In case of well-founded doubt of the proposed activity being in line with the Programme strategy, MA shall inform the MC about alternative proposals or views on the respective issue, where final decision is made.

4.2 Working groups

Working groups of Interact teams are set up to coordinate joint delivery of activities, across all Interact Offices. The groups work as project teams, created in order to coordinate concrete activities, events and tools to be produced. Focus and membership of the working groups is directly linked to expected results of the Multi-Annual-Work-Programme and the work packages of the JAWPs.

Below a graphic visualisation of how groups work together for joint annual work plan development.

Figure 2. How groups work together to develop the JAWP

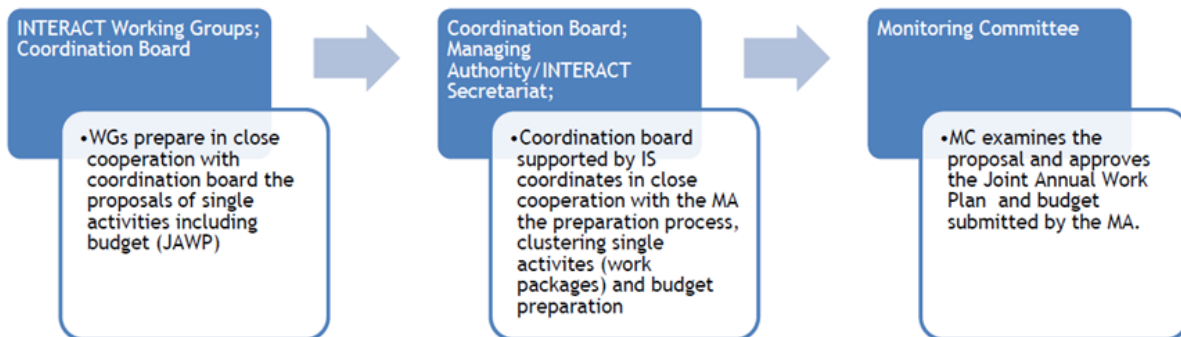
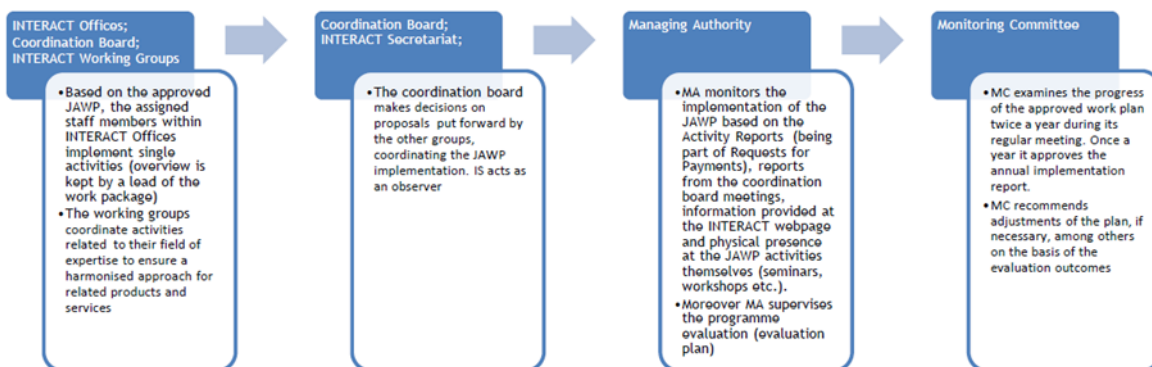


Figure 3. How groups implement the JAWP



5 Horizontal tasks

Based on the experience of Interact II and the challenges of managing horizontal tasks centrally from a distance from service delivery, it has been decided to distribute these tasks among Interact Offices.

Table 3. Distribution of horizontal tasks among Interact Offices

Task	MA/IS task	Interact Office tasks	Interact Office responsible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication, including website/online information to ETC programmes; website and IT management, including specific tools to ETC programmes³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Server housing and hosting; webmaster for technical management, ERT/CDB; intranet; mail server; Interact monitoring system; Responsibility for supervising, co-planning and monitoring the fulfilment of the communication strategy and plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning; Implementation; Procurement; Communicating Interact products (e.g. visual identity, newsletters, promotional materials, content of the website, management of ERT/CDB); Communicating ETC - tools and services for ETC promotion (e.g. EC Day, capitalisation publications, EU-wide visibility campaigns) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IO Vienna - Interact Products; IO Valencia - ETC promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Management, including setting quality standards⁴. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting the strategy and evaluation plan, supervising, co-planning and monitoring. Responsibility for the evaluation on programme level. Control over data related to quality management. Procurement of external evaluator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting and the implementation of on-going programme internal evaluation (data collection-analysis), quality standards in all services and products, support with HR management / training needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IO Viborg

6 Regional and national networks

6.1 Why a “regional” approach for Interact Offices?

Bearing in mind the importance and weight of joint services to the target groups by Interact, the regional approach only complements the joint service portfolio.

Stronger links and contacts to networks of programmes in a specific geographic area or strand showed to be very effective in 2007-2013 period: regional, functional or specific networks of programmes helped Interact reinforce information flows from programme authorities and other target groups, i.e. through collecting their experiences, practices and needs, as well as information flows to programme authorities, i.e. disseminating key information, e.g. regulatory changes, etc. At the same time it helped Interact in building up a specific expertise and delivering demand-driven and targeted services to the networks. This is kept in the 2014-2020 period. Place-based thematic

³ In line with the Regulation, MA keeps overall responsibility on implementation of the Communication Strategy, while delegating concrete tasks to the Interact Communication Manager, in agreement with the Interact Office in charge.

⁴ In line with the Regulation, MA keeps overall responsibility on programme evaluation, while delegating concrete tasks to the Interact Quality Manager, in agreement with the Interact Office in charge.

approach forms a solid basis of support services for knowledge networks. In parallel thematic expertise is strengthened and developed through the joint service portfolio.

The 2014-2020 ESIF programmes have a renewed accent on results. This implies for Interact a horizontal perspective across programmes, while a geographical approach helps to reinforce achieving the results both in Interact and in the programmes, in order to ensure more that programmes adopt or follow the good practices identified. Thus, the balance between horizontal and regional perspective aims at a better accomplishment and fulfilment of Interact results.

The regional approach is an asset for Interact:

- a) For **increased closeness to target groups**: Interact teams know these better (who they are, how they work, what and how they need things, expectations, issues), understand their languages/administrative culture, are able to target their gaps and specific needs in area-specific services. Thus, regional analysis shall be included in the annual needs assessment, as well as in programme evaluations.
- b) For **improved communication flows**: improving communication and knowledge sharing from and to these groups means also that the good practices identified through regional-national services shall be widely promoted across areas. At the same time, regional-national-transnational-macro-regional services should as a principle include examples from outside (e.g. speakers from other areas or Member States, good practices identified by Interact from other areas).
- c) For **increased territorial overview**: Evaluate how Interact covers specific area needs, how the area can use Interact products, making sure that all areas of Europe are involved in Interact and aware of Interact products in a balanced way. This will be applied to planning and evaluation:
 - Analysis of annual programmes participation shall include the territorial aspects;
 - Evaluation plan of Interact to include regional analysis and measures;
 - Annual communication plans of Interact to include an analysis and specific measures for the regions/countries (e.g. the ones not sufficiently involved, participating or using Interact services);
 - Each Interact Office takes care of updating contact databases of the regional key actors, e.g. actual heads of MAs/JSs, regional/national Interreg key contacts, etc.

6.2 Principles to be applied

While working with regional/national networks, following principles shall be applied by the Interact Offices:

- Balance effort/cost/benefit

As Interact resources are not unlimited, limit the efforts and number of services devoted only to a certain region, Member State or number of programmes (only if needed/most effective principle). Thus, when a service can be offered from a horizontal perspective to all programmes, this will be the priority. Notwithstanding, advisories or specific needs will be dealt with, when needed and possible, with a clear priority on the regional/national needs, which were expressed well in advance, i.e. while drafting the joint annual work plans, instead of short notice requests.

- Balanced approach

A balance between regional approach and exchange across EU areas will be kept when planning activities addressed to specific areas. Programme managers of a regional area should have the possibility to meet and exchange practices with programmes of other areas to promote cross-fertilization. Thus, as a principle, any geographically focused service will include examples from outside. Again, when a service can be offered more effectively to all programmes, it will not be duplicated. Programmes of specific geographic areas (e.g. EU border regions in Western Europe), having more than 20 years cooperation experience, are often less interested in participating in Interact events. Interact shall find the most effective way to involve them, in order for less experienced programmes to also benefit from their experience. At the same time Interact needs to

develop an attractive service package for these programmes so that they as well can enjoy the full benefits of our services.

- Language and backgrounds balance

In the Interact team profile, the balance of different languages and administrative backgrounds across Offices is overall assured. Nonetheless, it is not possible that Interact teams cover all languages in all thematic expertise fields. The official Programme language is English and services shall be provided in English language, being also the most time and cost-efficient way of working. Specific ad-hoc regional-national advisories in national languages are still possible, within the limits of a sound yearly planning, thus if these were included in the development of the Joint Annual Work Plans, as well as if resources and specific knowledge are available in Interact.

- Build up regional knowledge

Interact Offices build up knowledge of the area programmes and national networks that is also useful in the horizontal services. They take care of the updates of contacts data for the key regional/national Interreg actors. In doing this, they increase understanding of how specifically they work and what they most need, taking advantage of personal contacts. For this purpose, contact database and direct communication with the network is essential.

- Open networks approach

A knowledge network is necessarily open, because in principle there is very limited knowledge creation/ sharing in closed circles of persons. The regional and national networks shall benefit from the knowledge from outside, which should be provided by Interact based on the interests and topics. This shall be based on internal expertise in Interact (e.g. HITs, State Aid, 20% flexibility, closure), but also on identified external good practices. Even participation in network meetings shall be kept open as a general rule, in order to allow for real knowledge exchange.

- Interest-based work

The basic principle to make regional networks work well, is that they have an actual and concrete need or interest to work together and exchange, therefore the key of success is entirely based on the topics, to be agreed by both Interact and the networks members.

Factsheet No 3.

Programme-level rules on eligibility of expenditure

1 Introduction

1.1 Hierarchy of eligibility rules

Rules on eligibility of expenditure are defined on the following levels of the legal hierarchy:

1. EU Regulations (Financial Regulation, CPR, ERDF Regulation, ETC Regulation, Delegated Regulation⁵, etc.);
2. *Programme-level rules (established based on Article 18(2) of the ETC Regulation)*;
3. Rules of the respective Member State (MS) in which the expenditure is incurred (i.e. MSs hosting Interact Offices and programme bodies: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Slovakia and Spain);
4. Internal rules of the organisations hosting the Interact Offices or programme bodies.

This document lays down the *programme-level* eligibility rules applicable for the Interact III cooperation programme. Rules of the Member States and hosting organisations shall apply only in areas not regulated on the EU and programme levels (even if national or local practices include stricter rules).

1.2 Scope

Unless otherwise indicated, these rules shall be applicable to both priority axis 1 Service delivery (PA1) and priority axis 2 Technical Assistance (PA2), taking into account the nature of activities under the priority axes.

For the purposes of this document, ‘beneficiary’ shall mean the respective hosting institutions of the Interact Offices, Managing Authority, Interact Secretariat, Certifying Authority and Audit Authority and/or the organisations to which the hosting organisations delegate certain tasks in line with Article 15 of the subsidy contract. For the purposes of this document, ‘Programme’ shall mean the Interact III 2014-2020 cooperation programme, including also the running of the 4 Interact Offices (operations in the sense of Article 2(9) of the CPR).

Preparation, control and audit costs concerning subsequent or previous programming periods, i.e. for closing INTERACT II or preparing a future programme, are eligible on the basis of the cross-financing principle (Article 59 of the CPR) applied in Interact for both PA1 and PA2. Since beneficiaries of INTERACT II contributed to development of Interact III, their costs for closing the operations within INTERACT II should be eligible under Interact III.

2 General rules

2.1 General rules on eligibility

In order to be considered eligible under the Programme, expenditure shall meet the below general criteria:

- It shall concern activities of the beneficiary to be carried out under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract;
- It shall be necessary to implement the Programme and activities of the beneficiary under the Programme. In particular, expenditures necessary to run the operations shall be reimbursed to the widest extent, taking into account that beneficiaries carry out activities for the benefit of the Programme target groups;
- It shall comply with the principle of sound financial management (i.e. principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness);
- It shall not have received co-financing/support from other EU or national funds (no double funding);

⁵ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 481/2014 of 4 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to specific rules on eligibility of expenditure for cooperation programmes

- It shall have been incurred and paid by the beneficiary;
- It shall be registered in the beneficiary's accounts through a separate accounting system or adequate accounting codes applied specifically for the Programme;
- Where applicable, it shall be in compliance with relevant (public) procurement rules;
- Proper audit trail shall exist;
- It must have been validated by the designated national controller.

2.2 Eligibility of activities outside the Union part of the programme area

Based on the priority axes of the Programme (i.e. PA1 Service delivery and PA2 Technical assistance) and taking into account the thematic objective/investment priority selected for PA1 (see section 1.1.2 of the cooperation programme document), it can be established that all activities carried out under the Programme concern *capacity building, promotional activities or technical assistance*. Furthermore, since all activities are for the benefit of the programme area, including the ones carried out outside the Union part of the programme area, as well as they are carried out only by or on behalf of the beneficiaries (thus subject to regular management verifications), all activities carried out outside the Union part of the programme area are eligible according to Article 20(3) of the ETC Regulation.

2.3 Start and end date of eligibility

Eligible expenditure has to be incurred and paid by the beneficiary between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2023. In addition, expenditure incurred before 1 January 2016 - in any case not before 1 January 2014 - but paid after that date shall be also eligible.

3 Specific rules by expenditure category

In accordance with Article 1 of the Delegated Regulation the following categories of expenditure are eligible under the Programme:

1. Staff costs;
2. Office and administrative expenditure;
3. Travel and accommodation costs;
4. External expertise and services costs; and
5. Equipment expenditure.

The following sections describe in detail the above budget categories as per the following:

- Definition;
- Category-specific rules;
- Eligible expenditure items;
- Reimbursement options (if applicable);
- Calculation method(s) (if applicable); and
- Audit trail.

3.1 Staff costs

3.1.1 Definition

Costs of staff members employed by the beneficiary formally assigned to work under the Programme in any of the following ways:

1. Full-time;

2. Part-time
 - a) with a fixed percentage of time dedicated to the Programme per month;
 - b) with a flexible number of hours dedicated to the Programme per month;
3. Contracted on an hourly basis.

It includes staff costs of employees in line with the employment or work contract and costs of natural persons working for the beneficiary under a contract other than an employment contract (jointly referred to as 'employment document') and receiving salary payments.

3.1.2 Category-specific rules

- Salary levels of Interact staff shall be established or maintained ensuring that they are competitive on EU-level and thus facilitate keeping, motivating and attracting/hiring international ETC experts from the entire territory of the EU⁶.
- Daily allowances (or other costs related to missions) cannot be included under this category (but under travel and accommodation costs).

3.1.3 Eligible expenditure items

The below elements constitute eligible components of staff costs⁷:

- Salary payments fixed in the employment document or by law;
- Any other costs linked directly to the salary payments, incurred and paid by the beneficiary, as fixed in the employment document and in line with national legislation and rules and standard practises of the beneficiary, such as employment taxes, social security including pensions, overtime if actually paid to the staff member, holidays⁸, taxable benefits (e.g. lunch vouchers), maternity and equivalent paternity benefits, benefits in respect of accident at work, family benefits, as far as not recoverable by the beneficiary, etc; furthermore
- Relocation benefits;
- Bonus payments;
- Payments related to termination of employment.

3.1.4 Reimbursement options

Staff costs under the Programme shall be reimbursed on a real costs basis.

3.1.5 Calculation methods

The following methods shall be applied to calculate the individual staff costs depending on the formal assignment to work under the Programme, in line with Article 3(1) of the Delegated Regulation:

1. Full-time: the staff member concerned dedicates 100% of his/her working time to the Programme:

$$\text{Eligible staff costs} = \text{Total gross employment cost}$$

⁶ For the comparison, the EU level and not the national/local level shall be taken into account.

⁷ As far as allowed in the national systems or contractually regulated.

⁸ Since the Programme is the continuation of the INTERACT II 2007-2013 operational programme, holidays earned by staff members while being employed under the previous programme can be carried over to and the related costs shall be eligible under the Programme in line with Article 65 of the CPR (1 January 2014).

- 2.a) Part-time with a fixed percentage of time dedicated to the Programme per month: the staff member dedicates a fixed percentage of his/her working time to the Programme:

Eligible staff costs = Fixed percentage worked on the Programme × Total gross employment cost

- 2.b) Part-time with a flexible number of hours dedicated to the Programme per month: the staff member dedicates a flexible part of his/her working time to the Programme. In this case, for each employee, the beneficiary shall select one of the two calculation methods below:

- i) *Eligible staff costs = Hourly rate × Number of hours worked on the Programme per month*

Where the hourly rate is to be established based on the monthly working time fixed in the employment document:

Hourly rate = Monthly gross employment cost / Number of hours per month fixed in employment doc.

- ii) *Eligible staff costs = Hourly rate × Number of hours worked on the Programme per month*

Where the hourly rate is to be established based on a standard number of 1720 hours per year:

Hourly rate = Latest documented annual gross employment cost / 1720 hours.

3. Contracted on an hourly basis: the employee is contracted on an hourly basis, dedicating a certain number of working hours to the Programme. The staff costs equal the part of the gross employment costs depending on the number of hours actually worked on the Programme:

Eligible staff costs = Hourly rate × Number of hours worked on the Programme

Where the hourly rate is fixed in the employment document.

3.2 Audit trail

The following main documents shall be available for the purposes of management verifications depending on the formal assignment to work under the Programme:

1. Full-time:

- Employment document (stating explicitly full time employment for the implementation of the Programme);
- Job description (setting out responsibilities concerning the Programme, either separate or part of the employment document);
- Payslips (or other document indicating gross employment costs);
- Proof of payment⁹ of salaries and employer's contributions;
- Working time registration (activity timesheets) must not be required as the employment document gives sufficient evidence that the staff member concerned works 100% on the Programme.

- 2.a) Part-time with a fixed percentage of time dedicated to the Programme per month:

- Employment document;
- Job description (setting out responsibilities concerning the Programme, either separate or part of the employment document);
- Document setting out the percentage of working time to be dedicated to the Programme (if not included in any of the previous documents);

⁹ The check on the proof of payment should take into account the accounting system, the practices and the procedures of the beneficiary. In other words the proof of payment in certain systems may not require an actual bank statement confirming the transfer if the accounting system of the beneficiary 'guarantees' such transfer by its procedures. This refers to all proofs of payment in this document.

- Payslips (or other document indicating gross employment costs);
- Proof of payment of salaries and employer's contributions;
- Working time registration (activity timesheets) must not be required (as the document setting out the percentage of time to be dedicated to the Programme gives sufficient evidence on the working time under the Programme).

2.b) Part-time with a flexible number of hours dedicated to the Programme per month:

- Employment document;
- Job description (setting out responsibilities concerning the Programme, either separate or part of the employment document);
- Payslips (or other document indicating gross employment costs);
- Data from the working time registration system with information on the number of working hours spent on the Programme per month (e.g. timesheet). The time registration system shall cover 100% of the actual working time of the staff member.
- Documentation on the latest annual gross employment cost, if calculation is based on standard number of hours;
- Proof of payment of salaries and employer's contributions.

3. Contracted on an hourly basis:

- Employment document;
- Job description (setting out responsibilities concerning the Programme, either separate or part of the employment document);
- Payslips (or other document indicating gross employment costs);
- Data from the working time registration system with information on the number of working hours spent on the Programme per month (e.g. timesheet);
- Proof of payment of salaries and employer's contributions.

3.3 Office and administrative expenditure

3.3.1 Definition

Office and administrative expenditure shall cover the general administrative and operating costs of the beneficiary that are necessary to carry out its respective activities or obligations resulting from these activities under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.

3.3.2 Eligible expenditure items

Eligible expenditures under this category are limited to the below items:

- a) office rent;
- b) insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff is located and to the equipment of the office (e.g. fire, theft insurances);
- c) utilities (e.g. electricity, heating, water);
- d) office supplies;
- e) general accounting provided inside the beneficiary organisation;
- f) archives;
- g) maintenance, cleaning and repairs;
- h) security;
- i) IT systems;
- j) communication (e.g. telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards);

- k) bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where the implementation of an operation requires a separate account to be opened;
- l) charges for transnational financial transactions.

3.3.3 Reimbursement option(s)

Based on section 7 of the cooperation programme document and in line with article 68(1)b) of the CPR, these expenditures shall be reimbursed as flat rates of the below percentages of the respective eligible staff costs: Austria: 15%, Denmark: 15%, Finland: 11%, Spain: 15%, Slovakia: 11%.

The flat rate covers all office and administrative costs of the beneficiary, be it either direct or indirect, therefore

- additional real costs are not eligible under this cost category; and
- elements eligible under this category shall not be included in any other category.

Beneficiaries shall have the right not to claim reimbursement of office and administration expenditure.

3.3.4 Calculation method

The following calculation method shall apply:

Eligible office and administration expenditure = FR_MS × Eligible staff cost of the beneficiary

Where 'FR_MS' indicates the flat rate percentage applicable for the MS concerned.

3.3.5 Audit trail

Since beneficiaries are not required to prove that the flat rate corresponds to reality or that the expenditure reported has been incurred and paid, they do not need to submit justification for the flat rate or supporting documents for this cost category. Management verifications therefore shall be limited to verifying

- that the base to which the flat rate is applied (eligible staff costs) is correctly calculated;
- the correct application of the flat rate (i.e. whether calculation of the amount reported under office and administration is correct); and
- that elements eligible under this category are not reported under any other category (i.e. there is no double-financing).

3.4 Travel and accommodation costs

3.4.1 Definition

This category concerns travel and accommodation costs of the staff of the beneficiary working for the Programme, which are necessary to carry out its activities under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.

3.4.2 Category-specific rules

- Based on the priority axes of the Programme (i.e. PA1 Service delivery and PA2 Technical assistance) and taking into account the thematic objective/investment priority selected for PA1 (section 1.1.2 of the cooperation programme document), it can be established that all activities carried out by the beneficiaries staff under the Programme are for the benefit of the programme area and concern *capacity building, promotional activities or technical assistance*. Therefore travel and accommodation expenditures outside the Union part of the

programme area, related to the implementation of the Programme are eligible according to Article 20(3) of the ETC Regulation.

- The principle of sound financial management shall apply to the choice of transport. Effectiveness shall be the leading principle, also ensuring cost efficiency, taking into account the entire cost of travel (travel costs, cost of accommodation as well as travel time staff costs related to the mission). In practice, the cost of additional staff hours must be taken into account when choosing between different travel options.
- Costs shall be eventually borne by the beneficiary. Direct payment by a staff member of the beneficiary must be supported by proof of reimbursement to the staff member of the beneficiary.
- Travel and accommodation costs of service providers, external experts or natural persons not employed by the beneficiary but contributing to the event or meeting or other purpose of the mission (e.g. speakers, chairpersons, moderators) shall be planned and reported under the external expertise and services category.

3.4.3 Eligible expenditure items

Eligible expenditures under this category are limited to items listed under Article 5 of the Delegated Regulation:

- a) travel costs (e.g. tickets, travel and car insurance, fuel, car mileage, toll, and parking fees);
- b) the costs of meals;
- c) accommodation costs;
- d) visa costs;
- e) daily allowances.

The following rules shall apply to the travel and accommodation elements:

- Regarding a) travel costs: all means of transport, i.e. flights and public transport (including boat, ferry, trains and bus) of all classes, taxi, car rental as well as use of private cars) are eligible in accordance with the sound financial management principle as outlined above. The cost of CO₂ compensation included or calculated in the flight ticket price is eligible.
- Regarding c) accommodation costs:
 - The choice of accommodation shall ensure standards as required by the nature of Interact work (i.e. intensive travel requirements), even where national/international categorisations are not applicable;
 - The location shall be suitable for the purpose of the mission (e.g. when organising events, to the extent possible staff should be staying in the hotel venue).

Reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenditure to applicants of Interact job positions participating in interviews is eligible.

Subject to the above rules, the cost of tickets and accommodation related to missions where travel is eventually cancelled can be relevant expenditure and eligible, provided all the followings conditions are met:

- The mission/travel is cancelled because of unforeseen external events or circumstances (e.g. strike, illness, weather conditions);
- The reason for cancellation is duly proved/documented;
- The price of ticket(s) or accommodation is not refundable;
- These costs are not covered by insurance.

Any element listed under points a) to d) covered by a daily allowance shall not be eligible for reimbursement in addition to the daily allowance (no double financing).

3.4.4 Reimbursement options

Travel and accommodation costs shall be reimbursed on a real costs basis.

3.4.5 Audit trail

The following main documents need to be available for the purposes of management verifications:

- Agenda, invitation or a similar document indicating the content, date and place of the meeting or event;
- Paid invoices (invoices, bills, tickets, etc.);
- Daily allowance claims; and
- Proof(s) of payment;
- Documents proving the reason of cancellation of travel/mission, where applicable.

3.5 External expertise and services costs

3.5.1 Definition

Expenditure on cost of external expertise and services provided by a public or private body or natural person, outside the beneficiary organisation.

3.5.2 Category-specific rules

- Travel and accommodation (and any other additional) costs related to external experts or service providers shall be included in this category.

3.5.3 Eligible expenditure items

In line with Article 6 of the Delegated Regulation, the below items of expenditure shall be eligible under this category:

- a) studies or surveys (e.g. evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks);
- b) training¹⁰ (e.g. for staff members assigned to work on the Programme and for Interact target groups);
- c) translations;
- d) IT systems and website development, modifications and updates¹¹;
- e) promotion, communication, publicity or information linked to the Programme;
- f) financial management;
- g) services related to the organisation and implementation of events or meetings (including rent, catering or interpretation, external speakers);
- h) participation in events (e.g. registration fees);
- i) legal consultancy and notarial services, technical and financial expertise, other consultancy¹² and accountancy services;
- j) intellectual property rights;
- k) verifications under Article 125(4)(a) of the CPR and Article 23(4) of the ETC Regulation;
- l) certification and audit costs on programme level under Articles 126 and 127 of the CPR;
- m) the provision of guarantees by a bank or other financial institution where required by Union or national law or in a programming document adopted by the monitoring committee;
- n) travel and accommodation for external experts, speakers, chairpersons of meetings and service providers;
- o) other specific expertise and services needed to carry out the activities of the beneficiary under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.

¹⁰ Trainings can be organised by one Office, where staff from other offices participate. Continuous trainings and personal development of staff are in general encouraged, including trainings to increase the capacity to work in teams across Interact offices. In case of doubts for the beneficiary, the MA shall advise on the eligibility of a specific training.

¹¹ Including IT systems provided as a service for Interact target groups and IT systems supporting Interact service delivery and coordination.

¹² E.g. IT or public procurement.

3.5.4 Reimbursement options

Expenditure on costs of external expertise and services shall be reimbursed on a real costs basis.

3.5.5 Audit trail

The following main documents need to be available for the purposes of management verifications:

- Evidence of the selection process, in line with applicable national or EU (public) procurement rules;
- Contract or written¹³ agreement laying down the services to be provided with reference to the Programme. For experts paid on a basis of a daily/hourly fee, the daily/hourly rate with the number of days/hours contracted and the total contract amount shall be provided. Where applicable, amendments to the contract in line with applicable (public) procurement rules.
- Invoice;
- Proof of the output of the work of the external expert or service provider or deliverables (in any form available);
- Proof of payment.

3.6 Equipment expenditure

3.6.1 Definition

Expenditure for financing of equipment purchased, rented or leased by the beneficiary, which are necessary to carry out its respective activities under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.

3.6.2 Category-specific rules

- Purchase cost of equipment is eligible if used solely for the purposes of the Programme and for the activities of the beneficiary as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.
- For equipment used only partially for the Programme only a *pro rata* cost related to the degree of use is eligible. The share has to be calculated according to a justifiable and equitable method in line with the accounting policy of the beneficiary organisation;
- Equipment items shall be depreciated in line with the international/national accounting rules, related to the duration of the operations.

3.6.3 Eligible expenditure items

In line with Article 7 of the Delegated Regulation, the below items of expenditure shall be eligible under this category:

- a) office equipment;
- b) IT hardware and software¹⁴;
- c) furniture and fittings;
- d) laboratory equipment;
- e) machines and work instruments¹⁵;
- f) tools or devices;
- g) vehicles;

¹³ For contracts of small value, written may be an email, if so agreed by the parties.

¹⁴ Including hardware and software necessary for service delivery for Interact target groups as well as supporting Interact service delivery and coordination.

¹⁵ Such as e.g. workshops material for Interact target groups.

- h) other specific equipment needed to carry out the activities of the beneficiary under the Programme, as set in the cooperation programme document/subsidy contract.

3.6.4 Reimbursement options

Equipment expenditure shall be reimbursed on a real cost basis.

3.6.5 Audit trail

The following main documents need to be available for the purposes of management verifications:

- Evidence of the procurement process, in line with applicable national or EU (public) procurement rules;
- Contract or written purchase order¹⁶, where applicable;
- Invoice;
- Proof of payment.

3.7 Joint activities principle

The principle of joint activities concerns activities implemented jointly by at least two Interact Offices or the MA/IS (joint activities). Interact Offices (IOs) involved may agree that instead of dividing a certain expenditure (e.g. invoice) according to a specific share, it is going to be paid entirely by one of the contributing IOs ('paying IO') in line with the principle of joint financing (see Article 12 of the ETC Regulation and section 5.3 of the cooperation programme document) and in order to reduce the administrative burden on programme level¹⁷.

The principle of joint activities shall apply for each expenditure category. Such costs shall be eligible under the following conditions:

- the expenditure shall be incurred, paid and reported by the paying IO; therefore
- management verification and audit obligations and arrangements of the paying IO shall apply to the expenditure concerned.

4 Conversion to euro

In line with section 5.5 of the cooperation programme document, expenditure incurred in a currency other than the euro shall be converted into euro by the beneficiaries using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the [European Commission](#) in the month during which that expenditure was submitted for verification to the controller.

5 Ineligible expenditure

- Ineligible expenditure in accordance with Article 69(3) of the CPR and Article 2(2) of the Delegated Regulation;
- Cost of purchase of land;
- In-kind contributions.

¹⁶ For contracts of small value, written may be an email, if so agreed by the parties.

¹⁷ For example, the paying IO can procure and pay the costs of the venue of an event jointly organised by several IOs; or an IO or the MA/IS can pay the venue, accommodation and travel costs for the entire Interact staff in case of a joint team meeting or training.

Factsheet No 4.

Budget principles for priority axis 1 Service delivery

1 Lessons learnt from Interact II

In Interact II the Technical Assistance (TA) budget, priority axis (PA) 2, financed the activities of MA, Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority, while a full-sized IS was financed mainly by PA 1 (Activity) budget. This budget was intended for horizontal activities, carried out for the benefit of the whole programme. As agreed during Interact III Programming Committee (PC) and Programming Task Force meetings, most of the horizontal activities and related budget shall be distributed among the four Offices while some services, not included in the tasks and functions of the MA, shall be still carried out by Interact Secretariat unit integrated in the MA, financed by PA 1.

For the services, according to the lessons learnt in Interact II and as discussed by the PC, the four Interact Offices shall deliver services with the same level of quality and quantity, across the four areas. Budget allocation to the Offices should reflect this principle distributing the budget in order to ensure equal operational capacity. In addition, each Office should receive budget needed from PA 1 according to the horizontal tasks assigned.

Interact success with its target groups is widely based on knowledge and skills of its staff. To be able to share expertise with target groups, it is important to build up and keep internal knowledge. This is precisely reflected on the budgets and spending levels of the Programme. A spending analysis highlights that share of staff expenditures is between 50% and 70% of the total budgets. As a general principle, this shall be kept also for Interact III.

2 Interact III budget principles for priority axis 1 Service delivery

2.1 Principles for budget allocation

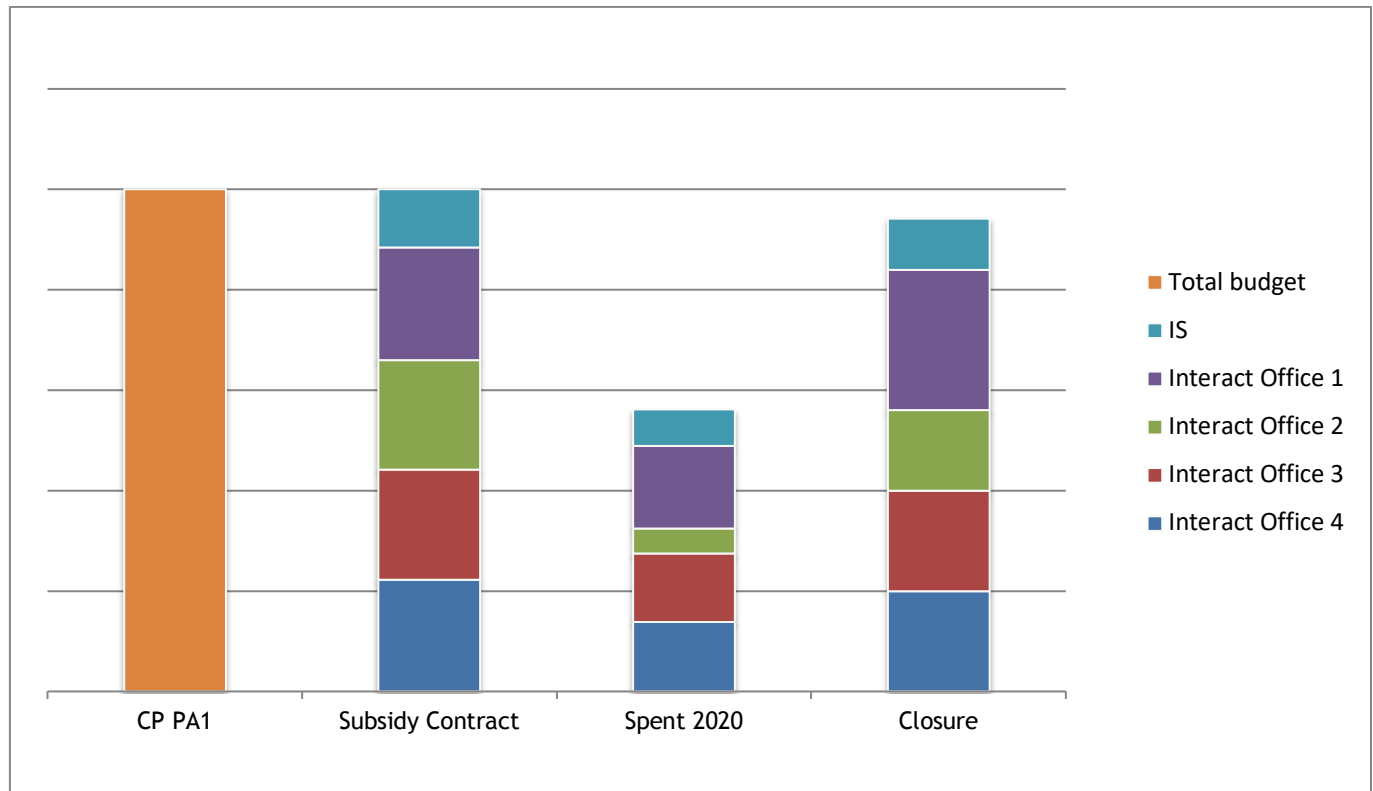
According to the lessons learnt, the Interact III Cooperation Programme is built on the following budget principles:

- The PA 1 budget is allocated to the four Offices starting from an equal split, per Office for the period 2016-2023 and taking into account price levels in each hosting country, the horizontal activities taken over, keeping into consideration the amounts needed by the IS to carry out its activities;
- The financial allocation in the subsidy contracts will be made per office and total budget lines for the whole programming period;
- Every year at its meeting in autumn, the Monitoring Committee shall approve an annual allocation for each Office on the basis of activities planned in the JAWP. Still this allocation shall comply with total limit set in the subsidy contract, i.e. it shall be carefully monitored to avoid excessive overspending in some years, which could potentially lead to bottlenecks in subsequent years;
- On the basis of an analysis of the spending capacities and activities planned by the Offices, and in order to minimise de-commitment risks, which becomes evident starting from the year 2020, the Monitoring Committee shall approve shifts of budgets among Offices;
- Total amounts allocated in the subsidy contract set at the beginning of the programming period, shall be reconciled at programme closure, i.e. the total allocated for PA 1 at CP level cannot be in any case exceeded.
- According to the spending analysis, staff/total budget proportion shall be monitored by the MA and MC during implementation and be from approximately 50% to approximately 70% of the total allocation. Internal expertise should be preferred over external experts (taking into account the limit of capacities of the internal staff), in order to ensure that core knowledge, skills and experience are kept;
- At the same time, costs per year per person (staff, travel and equipment) will clearly differ from country to country, but shall include an average 2% inflation per year;
- To enhance simplification, decrease control costs and error risks, beneficiaries shall be encouraged to use a flat rate of staff costs for office and administrative expenditure.

2.2 Visualisation of the Budget principles for priority axis 1 Service delivery

In this graphic visualisation, in column 1, the amount of the Programme Priority Axis 1 (CP PA 1) is allocated to Interact Offices through the subsidy contracts (column 2). In 2020, the overall spending level shows that Interact Office 2 is seriously under-spending, while Interact Office 1 has a high absorption capacity. At closure, therefore, the budget allocated to Interact Office 1 is increased through continuous new allocations of the JAWPs, while Interact Office 2 budget is consequently reduced. The budget shifts shall be performed upon the approval of the Monitoring Committee.

Figure 1. Budget principles for PA 1 Service delivery



Factsheet No 5.

Performance monitoring

1 Objectives

The objective of this factsheet on Interact III performance monitoring is to define the Cooperation Programme output indicators (performance framework), in order to collect harmonised data across all Interact Offices.

By doing this, Interact internal stakeholders shall build up a joint understanding on how progress towards achievement of outputs will be monitored at programme level, through the programme monitoring system.

2 Background

2.1 Principles to identify output indicators

Interact output indicators were defined based on the below principles, taking into account specificities of the programme and lessons learned from the 2007-2013 period for development and delivery of events and tools:

1. SMART indicators¹⁸;
2. Based on the document discussed by the programming committee (Interact III Activities and outputs);
3. The targets take into account:
 - ETC stakeholders' limited capacity to actively participate in Interact activities;
 - The available budget;
 - Interact capacity at the end of the 2007-2013 period;
 - An on-going shift towards online services to ETC programme managers, instead of physical meetings (also due to travel restrictions);
 - A clear request by target groups to focus on quality, instead of quantity.

2.1.1 Background

- The workflow of INTERACT has always been *demand-driven*. Concrete needs of the target groups have widely determined the nature and the scope of Interact activities.
- INTERACT II offered activities, which were not foreseen at the beginning of the programming period and could have not been fully programmed. INTERACT has *anticipated ETC programmes' needs*. INTERACT also adapted to strategic needs, emerging during the programming period.
- INTERACT's **flexibility** has also been widely recognised by its target groups as one of the key assets and success factors for INTERACT.
- The wide *flexibility of the demand-driven* approach has allowed INTERACT to *adapt* year-after-year to the changing ETC environment and shall be substantially kept in Interact III.
- It is not advisable to fix for the next 7 years precise numbers for specific types of events, or tools, because of the above-mentioned needs-orientation of all Interact services and changing environment (new strategic needs, new IT tools, etc.).
- When calculating the targets for events (indicator No 1) and tools (indicator No 2), the list of events and tools developed and implemented between 2011-2013 was considered:

¹⁸ As set in the Method for establishing the performance framework - Annex II CPR (Relevant, capturing essential information on the progress of priority; Achievable, with the given resources; Realistic, consistent with the nature of the specific objective; Transparent, i.e. easy to understand by any external observer, i.e. self-explanatory, with objectively verifiable targets and the source data identified, verifiable, without disproportionate administrative burden, as well as sufficiently flexible to accommodate emerging needs of the ETC context)

a) Events

- Each event organised by INTERACT was counted always as one (1.0) event as an average value, even though the resources used varied (from a small one-off workshop, requiring shorter preparation, to a working group on new tools or a large conference, requiring several staff and weeks of preparation).
- Each external event (not organised by INTERACT) was counted always as 0.5 event as an average value, even though the resources used vary (from a 15 minutes presentation, requiring few hours preparation, to the overall lead and draft concept and facilitation of workshops, requiring weeks or several staff members).
- The average number of events per year was estimated to be 128, based on the total amount for the period 2011-2013. Total for 2014-2020 was set as 890 ($\approx 128 \times 7$).

b) Tools

- Each tool (guidance, paper, publication, online tool produced by INTERACT) was counted always as one (1.0) tool as an average value, even though resources used vary (from a short fact sheet, requiring few days of preparation, to a comprehensive study, requiring many months).
- Each newsflash (regular info mail on activities by INTERACT) was counted always as 0.3 tool as an average value, because of the limited resources used.
- The average number of tools per year was estimated to be 36, based on the total amount for the period 2011-2013. Total for 2014-2020 was set as 250 ($\approx 36 \times 7$).

c) Number of participants

- The output indicator No 3 was added based on a recommendation of the ex-ante evaluation and only covers the participants attending events organised by Interact, (both online and in presence). In compliance with the request of the target groups to focus on quality instead of quantity, the aim is to reach a similar number of participants as in the 2007-2013 programming period (i.e. no increase is planned). The baseline was established on the basis of the total number of participants of 2013 INTERACT events, eliminating the 3 events with the highest and the 3 with the lowest number of participants. This figure was multiplied by yearly coefficients reflecting the number of events compared to 2013 to get the baseline figure of 13,240.

d) Setting 2018 targets

- Taking into account that the first implementation year of Interact III is 2016, the 2018 milestone target for the financial indicator was calculated by multiplying the average spending of INTERACT II in the years 2009-2011 (corresponding to 2016-2018 in the current programming life cycle) per 2,5 years (i.e. taking into account that by end of 2018 expenditures from 1 January 2016 until 30 June 2018 will be certified at programme level). The 2018 targets regarding tools and events are calculated as a proportion to this financial target.

Furthermore ex-ante evaluation outcomes included the following recommendations:

- To rename the output indicators to „Weighted number of events“ and „Weighted number of tools“.
- To enable the MA/IOs to assign larger values to the output indicators Number of events and Number of tools, in case that relatively large input is dedicated to an event or tool. Due to the specific character of each event and tool, it is extremely complicated and not effective to pre-define a methodology for this. It was therefore recommended that the MA/IOs identified such cases individually and assigned a value upon joint deliberation. This procedure shall be transparent and subject to monitoring by the Monitoring Committee and evaluations, which provides sufficient guarantees for its proper use.

3 Monitoring performance (output indicators)

3.1 Counting events and tools

In line with the Cooperation Programme approach, the recommendations expressed in the ex-ante evaluation, as well as the indications of the European Commission, in order to count Interact outputs a sound methodology needs to be agreed by all implementing bodies.

Events and tools developed by Interact might have different:

- a) Nature (seminar, conference, network meeting, study, paper, etc.),
- b) Objective (learning, exchanging practices, disseminating, analysing, etc.),
- c) Target groups (head of MAs, macro-regional coordinators, programme managers etc.),
- d) Implementation methodologies (workshop discussion, presentations, online paper, publication, etc.).

These differences shall not be the basis for the value for the events and tools output indicators, but the value shall be defined by the resources allocated, i.e. the input, necessary to 'purchase' a specific output is what makes a difference.

The scope of resources needed (financial and human resources) can vary significantly, because of the variety of services and target groups covered by Interact. The same kind of event (e.g. a 1.5 day workshop) or tool may require from few person/days preparation time up to several months, depending on the complexity of the subject, as well as maturity of the content to be delivered by Interact staff. A specific output can be achieved within a few weeks of work, or may require months (or even years in the case of some specific complex tools).

Financial resources also may vary significantly, depending on the need for external expertise to be acquired, location of the event, services required for the development of the technical tools, etc. For example, sometimes a meeting venue is provided free of charge by institutions or venues in some countries are much cheaper than in others.

For this reason typical patterns for events and tools (to be counted and reported as 1.0) shall be identified, while deviations shall be carefully estimated and then reported.

In order to respect the targets for output indicators in the CP and not to risk missing them, it is necessary to follow as much as possible a similar methodology used to calculate those targets, and only specify it further to the extent possible.

Based on INTERACT I and II practice, typical patterns can be identified for both events and tools.

a) Events

The standard (typical) Interact event (to be counted as 1.0) is characterised by:

- Typical size (to be established based on historical data expressed in participant days, taking into account the number of participants and the length of the event);
- Typical resources allocated/used (to be established based on historical data, taking into account the number of person days of Interact staff, value of external services (venue and experts) as well as travel expenditure, where applicable); and
- Interact being the main organiser of the event.

Thus the above factors will be taken into account when establishing the weight of an event for the output indicator. Whether Interact is the main organiser of the event or providing support (e.g. facilitation, moderation, presentation, advisory) to an external event is taken into account through the resources used (support to external events is usually less resource-intensive than an own event).

The objectives, nature and methodology used in the event (seminars, workshops, meetings, network meetings¹⁹, small conferences, working groups, lab groups, advisories, etc.) are instead rather heterogeneous and these do not lead to a different counting.

b) Tools

The standard (typical) Interact tool, e.g. a thematic publication or newsletter (*to be counted as 1.0*) is characterised by:

- Typical resources allocated/used (to be established based on historical data, taking into account the number of person days of Interact staff, value of external services (content contribution by experts, printing, software development, etc.) as well as travel expenditure (if applicable).

Thus the resources allocated/used will be taken into account when establishing the weight of a tool for the output indicator.

Larger tools made of different individually usable parts produced over longer periods of time, even several years (e.g. an independent module of an IT-tool or a single factsheet of a comprehensive manual) may be counted individually, but this needs to be taken into account upon completion of the tool to avoid double counting.

The objectives, nature and methods of tool can be rather heterogeneous (regular electronic newsletter, email advices, thematic technical publications, papers, templates, guidance texts, leaflet and flyers, online applications and databases, Interact software and online tools, etc.) and these do not lead to a different counting.

3.1.1 Joint events and tools

As Interact often organises events and develops tools, in which different Interact Offices and MA/IS actively contribute (both with own human and financial resources), there is a need to specify the basis on which joint outputs are reported by each office.

Based on the lessons learnt since Interact I, reporting of joint events and tools were agreed by the contributing offices and usually were allocated to the office that devoted the biggest resources (human and/or financial). Other contributors only specified in the reports what they contributed with, but did not count the output as own output. If the major contributor could not be identified, as resources are equally split, this was usually allocated on mutual agreement. This practice proved to be efficient and should be maintained.

3.1.2 How output indicators will be estimated, reported and monitored

As suggested in the ex-ante evaluation, due to the specific character of each event and tool, it is extremely complicated and not effective to pre-define a methodology for assigning these values. It has been therefore recommended that concrete cases of large or small events and tools (i.e. counting for more or less than 1.0) are identified, individually assessed and values are assigned upon joint agreement, ensuring monitoring by the Monitoring Committee and evaluations. The same should happen for the identification of the main contributor, where different offices jointly delivering the event or tool.

Accordingly and on the basis of the parameters highlighted above in this paper, a simple self-assessment table will be developed and provided to all Interact staff to establish the weight for the output indicator in order to have a harmonised application of the counting method in all offices.

¹⁹ Networks as such are in some Interreg programmes also considered as outputs. For the benefit of a concrete identification of what financial resources are used for, in Interact networks meeting are counted separately. The same happens for the product resulting from the network cooperation itself (paper, templates, etc.).

Transparency shall be ensured in all phases:



1. *During annual planning:* the estimation based on the self-assessment table shall be checked and agreed on between the lead person responsible for the output and the members of working groups, as well as re-confirmed by coordinators in the JAWP. For joint outputs, it shall also be agreed which office should have the lead and thus devote the biggest share of resources. Sufficient flexibility shall still be provided to accommodate new needs of the target groups during the year.
2. *During reporting per office to MA/IS:* the event or tool delivered shall be reported according to the estimation made through the self-assessment tool. Deviation from the JAWP (in size or leading office) shall be explained, still providing for sufficient flexibility for new needs and additional outputs delivered during the year.
3. *During monitoring at programme level:* MA/IS will aggregate and harmonise these data for reporting to Monitoring Committee and for the annual and final implementation reports to the European Commission.

3.2 Counting participants to Interact events and monitoring financial targets

The target for participants in Interact events was established on the basis of the figures of registered participants extracted from the online event registration tool used under INTERACT II. The tool is used for participants registration in events organised by Interact.

Exactly the same approach shall be used for counting the number of participants, i.e. extracting the figures from the Interact III online event registration tool.

It has to be noted that both the INTERACT II and Interact III online tools provide a precise picture of the registered participants, but in reality minor deviations in the actual number of total participants occur, e.g. in case some persons neither attend nor cancel their participation in the online tool, or some persons participate in the events without being registered online, or minor/repeated working group meetings are held, which are not necessarily registered in the tool, to decrease administrative burdens for participants. It is proposed to keep this simplified approach, because recording all deviations would lead to a non-proportional administrative effort (e.g. extra person/days to assure registration online and on the spot, count of signatures, etc.).

For the financial target, the annual reporting through the electronic monitoring system the annual reporting will be used.

Factsheet No 6.

Communication Strategy

1 Introduction

The Interact III 2014-2020 programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the national contributions from Member States. It is the successor programme to INTERACT II 2007-2013. It is a cooperation programme designed to support and improve the capacity of mainly Interreg, Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) programme managers in their everyday work.

The Interact III communication strategy defines specific communication objectives, target audiences, key messages and evaluation measures to support the achievement of wider programme goals. It follows the information and communication measures laid down in Articles 115, 116, 117 and Annex XII of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (CPR).

The communication strategy covers both the communication and dissemination activities to Interact target groups on Interact products as well as the services provided on communication to Interreg programmes.

The communication strategy is based on the Interact III programme objectives, a carefully made analysis on communication needs as well as the experience and evaluation of communication activities of the programme in the 2007-2013 programming period. The following documents and surveys served to the elaboration of the communication strategy:

- The Interact III cooperation programme 2014-2020
- The mid-term evaluation of INTERACT II information and publicity measures in 2011
- A stakeholder mapping analysis among all Interact offices and Member States in 2015
- Reflections made by the INTERACT II Communication Group in 2015 on the state of play of Interact and Interreg communication

2 Analysis of the current situation

Communication increasingly became a key element in the Interact programme during the 2007-2013 programming period and an integral part of working procedures throughout the programme cycle.

Against this background, a comprehensive study has been made to understand the different factors playing a role in the Interact task of communicating both the programme itself and Interreg. This includes the following exercises:

- PEST Analysis: analysis of external policy, economic, social and technological factors impacting both the Interact and Interreg communication, based on the new regulatory framework and internal analyses with Interact groups.
- SWOT Analysis for the promotion of Interact and Interreg: internal factors and trends impacting communication, based on the new regulatory framework, mid-term evaluation 2011 and internal analyses with Interact groups.

2.1 PEST Analysis

Table 1: PEST analysis

Policy	Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift towards simplified and standardised programme management Shift towards result-orientation More focus on the strategic coordination of the structural funds objectives Increased responsibility of projects and programmes regarding communication Requirement by the Commission for programmes to provide a communication contact and a communication strategy Extended target groups due to new forms of cooperation involve far more than the Interreg target groups e.g. macro-regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw attention to the involvement of programmes in communication activities proposed by Interact while programmes sometimes do not have full-time communication officers or no communication officers at all More focus on the engagement of programmes in Interact activities in general (no time and/or no resources, travel constraints and restrictions) Need to complement programme communication efforts which are limited because of the limited TA budgets in order to increase their communication capacity
Social	Technological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for a more thematic and strategic involvement of Interact, which requests addressing new target groups One of Interact's main expected results is to establish the leadership of an integrated Interreg communication strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General shift towards digitalisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-platforms for knowledge exchange provides an opportunity for online interaction Complementarities need to be searched between social media and usual multimedia tools (websites, videos...) Increased use of mobile devices (tablets, apps...) requesting adaptation to these new tools to keep in the loop

2.2 SWOT Analysis

2.2.1 Promoting Interact

Table 2: SWOT-analysis: promoting Interact

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact offers a platform for programmes to share their experiences • Interact helps programmes be open to new ideas • Programmes and the European Commission are on the same level at Interact events • Interact has personal contacts with many programmes • Interact is geographically close to programmes (cultural understanding of what they need) • Interact works closely with the EU Commission • Interact has a multidisciplinary and multicultural team • Programmes feel well informed about the opportunities offered by Interact and are generally satisfied with its tools and services • Interact is a non-profit organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact's contact database is not used to its full potential • Lack of graphic consistency in publications and visual identity • Bad timing in some communication activities (promoting a tool before the tool has been set up) • Content too technical, abstract, heavy with jargon and acronyms and few real-life and concrete examples • Evaluation of activities is not done promptly so it is difficult to adapt for next year's planning • Lack of coherence in approach towards media, opinion formers, EU officials • Proofreading exists but there is lack of consistent editing by a professional writer
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve relationships with programme communication officers, especially CBC • Improve the visibility of the Interact programme through the new Interact logo based on Interreg branding • Communicate Interact to new audiences through the media or by supporting Interreg communication through national, regional or local authorities • Better coordination within Interact concerning communication (both internal and external) with strong leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and much wider target audiences: how can we reach them? • Interact's continued decentralised structure, making alignment of messages more complex • Interact offices or personal networking approach rather than Interact approach • High competition among the Pan-European programmes, not always with a clear definition of which one does what. Synergies need to be established for a good alignment of the programmes

2.2.2 Supporting Interreg

Table 3: SWOT analysis: supporting Interreg

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative approaches to disseminate Interreg results (European Cooperation Day, Interreg branding, trainings on storytelling and web trends, contests) • Cooperation with the EU Commission • Learning about cooperation initiatives outside Interreg and collaborate with them (Council of Baltic Sea States, Swedish Institute) • Increased cooperation among transnational programmes • Involvement of programmes in social media to disseminate information about calls, events and news • Building of trust among programmes and changes of behaviour within public administrations • Interreg is a trailblazer for cooperation: ministries, authorities, mainstream programmes and other stakeholders use it as an example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of direct contact with projects • Speaking for Interreg while Interact not mandated to do so • Interact is on the same level as programmes but is expected to carry more weight vis-à-vis the EU Commission • Lack of cooperation among cross-border programmes • Promotion of results is still weak and results are often not described in a very clear way • Evaluation impact is low • Projects are sometimes not result-oriented enough
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More willingness from programmes to work together • Better relationship with the Commission allows Interact to voice Interreg's opinions/views/complaints • Online fora (social media) can make people more receptive to Interreg information • Barriers created by the programme areas are starting to break up • Willingness of programmes to devote time and resources to harmonisation projects (eMS, HIT, joint branding, etc.) • Better connection of communication and capitalisation activities can lead to a better promotion of project results and end-user stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact decentralised structure, making joint communication activities more complex • Too much focus on differences of each region instead of common points/cooperation • Some programmes still don't want to share information - some don't even cooperate with their partners • New types of territorial cooperation (like e.g. macro-regions) belong to Interact target groups, but cannot be precisely targeted and limited, unlike Interreg programmes • Competition between programmes to be under the spotlight • Big focus on sponsors (regions, project partners) rather than results • Great diversity of programmes complicates the development of joint messages

3 Programme objectives

Thematic Objective 11

- Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders
- Enhancing efficient public administration

Overall objective

- Address the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of Europe 2020 Strategy by supporting Interreg Cooperation Programmes in implementing their activities in the most effective way by giving guidance and area-specific expert input in solving implementation bottlenecks.
- Use networking methods that support cooperation as a means to contribute to the innovative integrated approach.

Specific objectives

- Improve management and control capacity of Interreg programmes
- Improve the Interreg capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes' results
- Improve the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches (EGTC, Revolving Funds, macro-regional strategies, article 96 of the CPR, ITI, etc.)

4 Communication objectives

The communication objectives set the framework for the communication activities to be successful. Detailed actions will be part of each year's work plan. The communication objectives for 2014-2020 include:

- 1: Promote the existence and use of harmonised tools and services
- 2: Ensure an adequate knowledge sharing in effective communication approaches
- 3: Streamline the dissemination of thematic content and key messages
- 4: Raise awareness about other cooperation instruments to maximise synergies

5 Target Audiences

Interact's target audiences have been split into the following groups:

- users: organisations members who use and benefit from Interact
- partners and supporters: organisations members who work with or promote Interact
- influencers: external stakeholders and organisations who have an impact on Interact/Interreg work
- internal stakeholders: members of Interact bodies.

The above target audiences were part of an analysis made by the Interact Offices where stakeholders were mapped according to their level of influence and involvement on Interact. Additionally, members of the Interact Monitoring Committee also reflected on the target groups at a country level for 2014-2020. Lastly, potential synergies with other organisations are examined in this chapter.

5.1 Users

Interact can count on those who are already quite involved (Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats) to help other target groups get more involved. A special focus should be put on relatively new target groups for Interact like key cooperation project partners on specific themes and coordinators of macro-regional and sea-basin

strategies. Reaching these groups may have a positive impact on the use of Interact tools and services or when it comes to promote Interreg.

5.2 Partners and supporters

In the programming period 2014-2020, Interact should continue working in close cooperation and improving the level of exchanges with DG Regio, European Commission. A potential increase in support to Interact from some bodies like Interact National Contact Persons and thematic networks would be found extremely relevant for future benefits. Links and synergies shall be found between Interact and the before mentioned bodies in order to strengthen cooperation and avoid overlaps. At the same time, Interact would like to be better known among other units and DGs in the European Commission, COESIF/EGESIG and other relevant networks in order to establish appropriate synergies.

5.3 Influencers

Interact has traditionally found difficulties in reaching certain target groups that would impact considerably the efforts made towards a successful Interact communication. More particularly, key players in meeting the objectives of the cooperation programme such as the media and other structural funds programme have not been consistently approached. Wider target groups outside Interreg will therefore be considered during the programming period 2014-2020 in order to raise awareness about the significance of cooperation and promotion of programme and project results. The evidence on the results of cooperation will be highlighted through examples in various themes.

Moreover, wider audiences will be reached through services provided by Interact to Interreg programmes. The communication activities are considered as part of Interreg communication support e.g. KEEP, European Cooperation Day during 2007-2013.

5.4 Internal stakeholders

The main internal stakeholders, target of internal communication, are:

1. The Interact Monitoring Committee
2. The Interact Managing Authority / Secretariat
3. The Interact Certifying and Audit Authority
4. The Interact beneficiaries hosting the 4 Interact Offices
5. The Interact Offices

In the programming period 2014-2020, Interact would like work more closely in cooperation with Monitoring Committee members in order to ensure an improved communication in decision processes. At the same time, Interact aims to significantly improve internal communication flows among all internal stakeholders.

5.5 Synergies with other organisations

There are several organisations providing training or networking opportunities on EU funds and programmes, but none of them seem to be as specialised on Interreg and cooperation, as Interact. General main strengths of Interact in comparison to these are features like the closeness to target groups (Interreg Programmes), the ability to provide tailor-made services according to needs, the focus on Interreg, the experienced staff, the geographical closeness to programmes (i.e. cultural understanding of what they need), the access to EU Commission (active participation in our events - tools development), the multidisciplinary and multicultural teams, the fact that Interact is not profit-driven, thus it is able to take more risks and try more innovative approaches. At the same time, Interact has a more cooperative and social learning approach.

Interact should search for complementarities and synergies with them, to avoid competing and developing duplicate services, but rather complement those with specific cooperation issues, as well as learning from the ways in which these organisations are successful. For instance, these organisations have a structured and streamlined way to present their events to their target groups (same way, long in advance, fixed content/speakers from the very beginning, etc).

6 Key messages

1) Promoting Interact

- We support you.
- We help you reach your objectives because working alone is not enough.
- Harmonisation and new approaches will help make cooperation work better.

2) Supporting Interreg

- We help you increase the visibility of your work by raising public awareness of Interreg and added value of cooperation.
- Promote your programme and Interreg as well as cooperation and the EU by telling good result stories and putting project achievements in the centre of communication.
- We ensure that thematic communication reaches new target groups.

7 Mission statement, description and slogan

Mission statement

We are an experienced international team who are passionate about cooperation. Cooperation can be complex; our job is to make it easier.

Description

The European Union is a mix of cultures and economies that will reach its full potential through mutual understanding and close cooperation. That is why the European Union supports cooperation in many ways. One of them is Interreg, an initiative specifically dedicated to helping European regions work together to find solutions to common economic, environmental, social and cultural challenges. There are more than 100 Interreg programmes managing thousands of cooperation projects throughout Europe who are dealing with these issues.

The Interact programme's specific mission is to support these programmes in their daily work. So to help them successfully navigate the Interreg world, we provide advice, organise learning events and develop a wide range of tools on:

- How to manage a European cooperation programme or project and comply with EU rules on finance and controls.
- How to communicate funding opportunities, as well as programme and project results.
- How to use new cooperation tools.

We also harmonise processes to help programmes work more efficiently and to make the life of project applicants easier. We act as a hub to allow programmes to exchange experiences and network. Finally, we constantly explore and encourage innovative ways of cooperating in Europe by supporting macro-regional and sea basin strategies as well as legal structures and initiatives to facilitate cooperation activities.

We provide services free of charge to all Interreg stakeholders: managing authorities, joint secretariats, monitoring committees, national contact points, first level controllers, certifying authorities, and audit authorities. We also collaborate closely with EU-wide, national and regional cooperation organisations, institutions and networks.

We are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by the 28 EU member states, Norway and Switzerland, and we have a total budget of 46 million EUR for the 2014-2020 period. We are part of the Interreg programmes - which are financed under the European Territorial Cooperation objective of the European Structural Funds - but we also support cooperation at the external borders of the EU (IPA/ENI CBC), as well as new forms of territorial cooperation.

Slogan

Interact - Cooperation works

8 Communication activities

Interact will focus on supporting Interreg programmes capacity to capture programmes' and project results. Eventually, Interact will also support the promotion of these results to the relevant (wider) audiences.

These actions will bear in mind both Interreg cooperation and the link with cooperation outside Interreg. The INTERREG Communication medium term strategies are defined in Interact's Multi-annual Work Programme under the following Expected Results: 1.1.2. Good practices, 1.2.1. Thematic expertise, 1.2.2. KEEP, 1.2.3. Interreg visibility.

The following activities introduce the necessary arrangements for the information and communication measures to be implemented in line with the communication objectives, using various forms and methods of communication at the appropriate level.

In line with Article 7 of the CPR, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that information and communication activities are accessible to persons with disabilities. The most recent web accessibility standards will be implemented, and due care will be taken with regard to accessibility of event venues. Sustainable development will also be taken into account and environmentally friendly principles will apply in all events/tools.

Internal communication

Information within Interact will be distributed and clearly communicated to all Interact Offices (which will be the direct contact to redirect the information to their respective hosting institutions), Interact Managing Authority / Secretariat, Interact Certifying and Audit Authorities, Interact Monitoring Committee. This information can be accordingly disseminated by the above bodies to relevant target groups.

Visual identity

The Interact III visual identity manual will set out the design guidelines and requirements for Interact products and documents. It is imperative that Interact communication activities are recognisable by all target audiences and the visual identity perceptible in external actions.

Digital platforms

The Interact website will be updated with information about the operational programme's implementation, including its main achievements. Building community engagement on relevant online platforms such as social media and e-tools for collaboration will help spread good practices and Interreg accomplishments as well as promote Interact events, tools and publications.

Tools, events and publications

In order to effectively communicate Interact tools, events and publications, careful planning will be done when drafting each year's Joint Annual Work Plan.

Media

In order to aim for the widest possible media coverage, the necessary means and methods will be implemented to promote Interact and Interreg achievements e.g. sending of press releases, development of lists of media contacts etc.

9 Evaluation

A robust and on-going evaluation of the communication strategy is required to ensure that the communication objectives²⁰ are met. The indicators below are designed directly in accordance with the communication objectives and the programme objectives. The list is not comprehensive and may be enlarged depending on the needs of the evaluation at the time.

Table 4: Communication indicators

Indicator	Impact on Cooperation Objectives
Awareness, knowledge and application of harmonised approaches and identified good practices Rationale: Programmes and, if applies, other organisations are enabled to use harmonised tools and learn about effective communication initiatives	No. 1 No. 2
Implementation of joint thematic communication activities and identification and promotion of flagship stories and or joint messages Rationale: Programmes are enabled to carry out (joint) thematic communication activities aiming at promoting results and key messages	No. 3
Awareness of other tools for cooperation and or EU funding schemes and their complementarities Rationale: Increasing knowledge of existing instruments and exemplifying effective synergies	No. 4

²⁰ No. 1: Promote the existence and use of harmonised tools and services
No. 2: Ensure an adequate knowledge sharing in effective communication approaches
No. 3: Streamline the dissemination of thematic content and key messages
No. 4: Raise awareness about other cooperation instruments to maximise synergies

10 Budget

The following indicative budgets are based on the average spending levels of Interreg programmes in communication. Detailed annual budgets will be provided with each Joint Annual Work Plan. IT tools are included in this budget because they are closely linked with Interact promotion. Like for any other activity of Interact, the budget for all activities of the Interact offices for supporting Interreg Communication is included in Joint Annual Work Plans. The below budget is included in the allocation to Interact Office Vienna and Interact Secretariat.

Table 5: Indicative budget

Type of activity	Budget 2016-2023 (EUR, without VAT)
Interact promotion	
Website (development and maintenance)	70,000
Graphic design	200,000
Printing	80,000
Dissemination costs	20,000
Promotional materials	50,000
Promotion of Interact at networking events	50,000
Professional pictures at Interact events	30,000
Mid-term evaluation of the communication strategy	40,000
Sub-total	540,000
Interact IT Tools	
Server (including Interact website)	800,000
Event registration tool	
Contact database	
Discussion forum (e-platform)	
Other tools	
Sub-total	800,000
Total budget	1,340,000

11 Timeline

In compliance with Article 116(2) of the CPR, the Interact III's monitoring committee will examine and approve the communication strategy no later than 6 months after the adoption of the cooperation programme by the European Commission.

The Interact III corporate identity, the new slogan, description and mission statement will officially launch in 2016 together with the new Interact website. Detailed actions and their timing will be provided in communication work packages developed as part of the Joint Annual Work Plans. In this respect, Interact will prepare a Joint Annual Work Plan every year. This work plan will include a work package entirely dedicated to promoting Interact as well as work packages dedicated to supporting Interreg, together with their related budget and reporting. A more precise targeting of specific groups of stakeholders shall be included in all Joint Annual Work Plans.

On-going evaluation of the communication strategy will be included as part of the overall programme's on-going evaluation measures. A mid-term evaluation of Interact promotion and communication activities will also be carried out halfway through the programming period.

The Monitoring Committee will examine the implementation of the communication strategy. To this end, the Managing Authority shall inform the Monitoring Committee at least once a year on the progress of the communication strategy and its results in compliance with Article 116(3) of the CPR.

If necessary, the strategy will be amended during the programming period to add new priorities, activities or target groups. In this case, the Managing Authority will submit it to the Monitoring Committee for approval in line with Article 110(2)(d) of the CPR.

12 Contact

As described under point 5.3.f) of the Interact III cooperation programme, the Managing Authority is the overall body responsible for the communication strategy. It will ensure that all programme implementers are complying with the communication strategy and will take corrective measures if necessary.

Interact Office Vienna received delegation from the Interact Monitoring Committee and Managing Authority to prepare and implement this communication strategy through the subsidy contract to be signed between the City of Vienna (beneficiary of the project “Interact Office Vienna”) and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region (Managing Authority of the Interact III programme).

The person in charge of developing and implementing the part of the strategy dedicated to promote Interact is the Interact Communication Manager based at Interact Office Vienna. Currently, Mr. Gabriel Alvarez: gabriel.alvarez@interact-eu.net

The part of the strategy dedicated to supporting Interreg will be implemented by the communication officers in each Interact Office. They can be contacted in the following address: comg@interact-eu.net.

The Interact III Monitoring Committee is kindly requested to:

- a) Approve version 1.2 of the Interact III Programme Guide 2014-2020.