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# **INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA Programme 2021 – 2027 EVALUATION PLAN**

**Version 1.0 - 25/08/2023**

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### *List of Acronyms*

Acronym	Description
<b>ETC</b>	European Territorial Cooperation
<b>CBC</b>	Cross Border Cooperation
<b>NUTS</b>	Common classification of territorial units for statistics
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>MC</b>	Monitoring Committee
<b>JS</b>	Joint Secretariat
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>IT-HR</b>	Italy-Croatia
<b>ESI</b>	European Structural and Investment funds
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>CPR</b>	Common Provisions Regulation
<b>EWG</b>	Evaluation Working Group



## SECTION I: GENERAL CONTEXT

### 1. Programme Context

The INTERREG VI A Programme Italy – Croatia 2021-2027, hereinafter referred to as the “Programme”, is approved under the European Territorial Cooperation framework, which is one of the two general objectives of the European Cohesion Policy and contributes to meet the challenges of the Green Deal and of the digital transition.

The overall vision of the Programme is enclosed in the following statement: **Focusing on innovation and sustainability in the blue economy, capitalising previous cooperation experiences, creating synergies with EUSAIR.**

#### a) Eligible area

The maritime cross-border area between Italy and Croatia, representing the Interreg Italy - Croatia Programme area, covers the following NUTS III regions<sup>1</sup>:

Italy	Teramo, Pescara, Chieti (Abruzzo Region), Brindisi, Lecce, Foggia, Bari, Barletta-Andria-Trani (Apulia Region), Ferrara, Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena, Rimini (Emilia-Romagna Region), Pordenone, Udine, Gorizia, Trieste (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region), Pesaro e Urbino, Ancona, Macerata, Ascoli Piceno, Fermo (Marche Region), Campobasso (Molise Region), Venezia, Padova, Rovigo (Veneto Region).
Croatia	Primorsko-goranska, Ličko-senjska, Zadarska, Šibensko-kninska, Splitsko-dalmatinska, Istarska, Dubrovačko - neretvanska (Adriatic Croatia region), Karlovačka (Pannonian Croatia region).

Currently, the Programme area covers an area of 85,562 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to 12,292,116 people in total. The majority of people, or about 88%, reside in Italian areas, with an average population density is of 143.66 people per km<sup>2</sup> while majority of inhabitants, around 88%, reside in the Italian areas.

The territory covered by the program's Croatian component has 177 municipalities and 65 towns. Major cities include Split (178,102 residents), Rijeka (128,624), Zadar (75,062), Pula (57,460 residents), Karlovac (55,705 residents), and Dubrovnik (42,615 inhabitants). The Italian portion is made up of 25 provinces and 1.267 municipalities, with the largest cities being Bari (316,491 people), Venice (259,961 people), Padua (210,995 people), Trieste (202,351 people), Ravenna (158,923 people), Foggia (150,652 people), Ferrara (132,931 people), Pescara (120,463 people), Ancona (99,307 people), and Udine (100,467 inhabitants).

The Adriatic Sea, which forms a natural link and a shared economic and environmental, resource for the Program territory, can promote collaboration. With a total area of 138,595 km<sup>2</sup> and an average width of



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170 km, the Adriatic Sea, its richness in flora and fauna offer significant opportunities for the growth of the Blue Economy sectors.

### b) Programme Budget

The Programme operates within the Interreg VI-A framework and is co-funded as follows:

1. 80% by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a budget of 172,986,266.00 EUR, including Technical Assistance (TA).
2. 20% by National co-financing (ruled by the respective Member State or project partners) for the remaining budget of 43,246,568.00, including TA.

The Programme total budget is 216,232,834.00 EUR, including TA, and 202,086,762,65 EUR without TA:

Priority	Specific Objective	ERDF Co Financing Amount	National Co Financing Amount	Total
1- Sustainable growth in the blue economy	1.1 - RSO1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	16,540,791.40	4,135,198.34	<b>20,675,989.74</b>
	1.2 - RSO1.4. Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	7,088,910.60	1,772,227.86	<b>8,861,138.46</b>
2 - Green and resilient shared environment	2.1 - RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches	37,632,360.40	9,408,090.24	<b>47,040,450.64</b>
	2.2 - RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	25,231,070.60	6,307,767.74	<b>31,538,838.34</b>
3 - Sustainable maritime and multimodal transport	3.1 - RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	33,561,161.00	8,390,290.72	<b>41,951,451.72</b>
4 - Culture and tourism for sustainable development	4.1 - RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	31,106,602.00	7,776,650.50	<b>38,883,252.50</b>



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5 - Integrated governance for stronger cooperation	5.1 - ISO6.6. Other actions to support a better cooperation governance	10,508,513.00	2,627,128.25	<b>13,135,641.25</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>161,669,409.00</b>	<b>40,417,353.65</b>	<b>202,086,762.65</b>



## 2. Regulatory Context

The regulatory framework of the Programme evaluation mainly refers to Art. 35 of Regulation (Eu) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The evaluation plan of the Programme has been prepared in compliance with the following regulatory framework:

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.
- Interreg VI-A Italy-Croatia Programme as approved by European Commission with decision n. 5935 of 10/08/2022 and n. 742 del 25/01/2023.

In addition, the evaluation plan is based on the following relevant European Commission (EC) guidance documents:

- Commission Staff Working Document (SWD (2021) 198 final): Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation of The European Regional Development Fund, The Cohesion Fund and The Just Transition Fund In 2021-2027;
- EVALSED: The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development; European Union Regional Policy, July 2008 (see the following [link](#)).

The definition of the joint Programme strategy has been grounded on the results of the Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis Report which was prepared by an external evaluator and thoroughly discussed in the Task Force of the Programme. This significant report has been published at the following [link](#).

According to regulation 1059/2021, art. 35, the MA shall prepare and submit to the MC the evaluation plan within 1 year from the approval of the Interreg Programme.

All evaluations, recommendations and follow-up actions will be examined by the MC. In line with art. 30 (d) of Reg. 2021/1059 (Functions of the monitoring committee) the MA will share with the MC all



evaluations: “[...] progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings”.

All the evaluations will be published on the Programme’s website as prescribed. Moreover, during the Programme mid-term review the main results of relevant evaluations will be illustrated to the European Commission.

## SECTION II: OBJECTIVES, COVERAGE AND COORDINATION

### 1. General framework of the evaluation plan

Previous experience of Evaluation activities taught not to be dispersive in criteria and evaluation questions to be externalised to an Independent Evaluator in order not to be superficial in the analysis, but to truly deepen the sight on a limited set of them. The view is strengthened by the limited and uncertain (for 21-27 programming period) resources available for evaluation.

This perception has been reinforced by the Commission which, into Art. 35 of Regulation (Eu) 2021/1059, limits the mandatory evaluation to just one.

So, the approach followed by Programme Bodies is that “less is more” and that focusing on a small range of evaluation criteria and questions to externalise to an independent evaluator was the best possible approach.

### 2. Role and objectives of the evaluation plan

The evaluation plan is designed to improve the quality of the Programme investigating its relevance, coherence and effectiveness in order to provide crucial information for Programme bodies to revise their strategy or to adjust according to findings during the programming period.

The evaluation plan is a strategic Programme document setting out how and which evaluations will be organized during the whole programming period; its objective is to support the result orientation and the evaluation of Programme effectiveness and impact. It represents a management tool for the implementation of the Programme by supporting quality evaluations to be used effectively by the MA to contribute to the implementation of an evidence-based, result-oriented Programme.

The main objectives of the evaluation plan are:





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- to provide a strategic framework to plan impact and operational evaluations;
- to improve through proper methodologies and tools planning at high quality of evaluations carried out during the whole programming period;
- to facilitate informed Programme management and policy decisions also on the basis of evaluation findings;
- to ensure that evaluations provide inputs for Programme reporting;
- to ensure that resources for funding the evaluations are appropriate and proportionate to the Programme financial size and needs;
- to provide a framework to ensure effective follow-up of the evaluations and the adequate communication about main findings and results.

According to EU legislation (Reg. 2021/1059, art. 35) the MA will carry out at least *“evaluations of the Programme[s] related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of Programme[s]. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme. In addition [...], an evaluation for each programme to assess its impact shall be carried out by 30 June 2029”*.

Moreover, the art. 35 foresees that *“evaluations shall be entrusted to internal or external experts who are functionally independent”*.

Therefore, the Programme has decided to carry out Programme evaluations involving both internal and external experts, focusing on different aspects of the evaluation process. Internal evaluation will be carried out by MA and JS skilled staff, while external evaluation will be contracted following a public procurement procedure.

The evaluation plan covers the following evaluation criteria:

- **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability** first of all aiming at capturing the effects of the intervention and thus **allowing Programme bodies to make timely adjustments to ensure an adequate Programme performance**: to be entrusted to external evaluators;
- **efficiency and communication**: to be entrusted to internal evaluators: the office that will develop internal evaluation has no direct involvement in the actuation of the programme, as the sub-unit working on monitoring is separated. Therefore, a more than sufficient grade of autonomy and independence is ensured to the evaluators. This is due to, respectively:
  - communication: during the start-up phase of the new programming period it is foreseen the appointment of a Communication Officer, foreseen by Art. 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, that will work in close coordination with the communication of the Programme and with the future appointed external experts. The need of assessing this new structure, despite not being mandatory,



it is reckoned important by the MA and this took to consider Communication as a criterion with its own relevant EQs. Moreover, the battery of communication indicators, the collection and analysis methodology developed and all the experience on evaluating communication activities accumulated by MA during the 14-20 programming shall not be scattered, but valorised. In fact, evaluating communication is a very peculiar task and, in order to be productive, a different evaluation team shall be individuated within the same or a different tender leading to a resource's dispersion.

- The experience accumulated by MA during 14-20 programming period span and the priorities in allocating resources led to the consideration develop this evaluation internally. Moreover, since within this criterion only internal qualitative information and MA's monitoring system data can be collected and analysed, it is quite limited the added value that an external evaluator can bear. Furthermore, it is not mandatory to assess this criterion, but since it is very important for MA it is reckoned necessary to be analysed; so, despite considering satisfactory the products delivered in 14-20, MA is trying to approach the matter in terms of continuous improvement, and it aiming at producing better quality outputs despite the resources available. Therefore, in term of cost-benefit analysis, it would be a loss of utility to externalise this criterion.

### 3. Coverage of the evaluation plan

This evaluation plan covers the Interreg Italy – Croatia Programme 2021-2027, co-financed by the ERDF and from National co-financing of both the Member States involved. The area covered by this evaluation plan is the whole Programme area as described in Section I above. Time-wise, the coverage of the evaluation plan spans up until December 2029, when the final performance report of the Programme shall be submitted to the European Commission.

### 4. Analysis of available evidence

The internal and external evaluators will base their analyses on the lessons learnt during the first Programme implementation period (2014-2020). In particular, the evaluators will find useful information within the three operational and two impact evaluations carried out in the previous programming period; all the documents have been published in the section Evaluation at the following [link](#). In addition, the Programme has foreseen to design an additional ad hoc impact evaluation referred to the period 2014-20.

It might as well be useful to consider potential evidence available from evaluations conducted by other ERDF Programmes funding operations in the same territories as the Italy-Croatia Programme in order allow the identification of common strategic elements where to focus the evaluation analysis.



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In full compliance with recommendations, lesson learned and previous experience, the present document has considered the following approach:

- ensure the involvement of key stakeholders whenever appropriate in surveys, workshops, other tools;
- include the emerging needs of the Programme, in particular linked to the topics of capitalisation of results and synergies with EUSAIR and with other EU-funded Programmes;
- identify effective procedure to promptly provide early warnings and amendments in case of possible failures;
- clearly define the roles and logically link the involved bodies, steps and mechanisms of the monitoring and evaluation system. This will allow building systems of information capable of feeding monitoring, performance and evaluation and “correlating” the strategy of the Programme with the indicators’ system;
- whenever possible, consider the results of evaluations carried out at project level, to feed the evaluations at Programme level.

Additionally, the 2021-2027 Evaluation Plan considers the specific context of the Italy-Croatia Programme as emerged in the **socio-economic and territorial analysis** produced by the external evaluator in the previous programming period, but also general lessons emerged at European level regarding the implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities in the ETC context.

Moreover, the level of consistency and complementarity of the Programme objectives to the relevant macro-regional, national and regional strategies has been taken into consideration: in particular, the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (**EUSAIR**) which covers all the Italian and Croatian Regions involved in the CP.

## 5. Coordination of evaluations

The aim of the current document and, consequently, of the activities of the external and internal evaluators, will be also to ensure that the **complementarity principle** is met at the stage of Programme management, monitoring, evaluation and control.

First of all, a permanent Evaluation Working Group (EWG), composed by representatives of the two national delegations was set up in the previous programming period (November 2019) and, with the agreement of the parties, has been renewed for the 2021-2027 programming period. The EWG shall be consulted in the whole evaluation process, from this Evaluation Plan to the collection of comments on all the Evaluation Deliverables.

The present evaluation plan takes into consideration those instruments, such as quantitative and qualitative data, interviews, and so on allowing the MC to assess if during the implementation of the Programme the coordination with other EU Funds as well as with macro-regional strategies, in particular EUSAIR, has been sought and put into practice.



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At Programme level, the MC, which is involved in all evaluation activities, encompasses a range of institutions involved in the implementation of national initiatives and national and regional as well as Interreg Programmes that allows for proper coordination of evaluations and a good follow-up of the evaluation conclusions and recommendations.

In addition, exchanges with other Managing Authorities of Programmes covering the same countries and regions or policy fields and sharing of information with other Interreg Programmes through the evaluation network facilitated by Interact will be enhanced.

Furthermore, the complete overlap of the geographical area where EUSAIR operates as well as the presence of other Interreg Programmes suggest the setting in place of further mechanisms of coordination:

- With IPA-ADRION and EURO-MED Programmes, in relation to the transferring of selected outcomes to the transnational dimension of cooperation;
- With the other Interreg Programmes especially involving Italian and Croatian beneficiaries, in relation to the implementation of operations and common identified Specific Objectives;
- With EUSAIR actors involved in its Governance, with regard to the Programme contributions to the Strategy implementation.

## SECTION III: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK, GENERAL TIMING and BUDGET

### 1. Evaluation process and responsible bodies

The main responsibility of the Programme evaluation process rests within the MA and within the MC, according respectively to art. 35 and to art. 30 of Interreg Regulation. Their functions are detailed below. The Managing Authority, supported by the JS, is responsible for designing and delivering the evaluation plan, which will be approved by the Monitoring Committee. The DG Regio Evaluation of European Commission can advise the MC at all stages of the evaluation process. The MA shall update the MC every time a relevant information arises. Any follow-up measures of evaluation findings will also be reported to the MC and in case of need for update to the plan, the MC shall approve each new version of the Evaluation Plan and after that the MA shall submit the plan to the EC for information through the SFC System. Finally, the evaluation plan will be published on the Programme website together with all the evaluation reports that will be produced during the programming period.



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The MA is responsible for preparing the tender and for selecting the external evaluator. Special attention will be devoted in the preparation of the Terms of Reference (ToR), drafted with the support of the JS, as a key step for assuring good quality evaluation.

For the definition of the ToR, Commission guidance documents shall be used as well as previous MA or other Regional offices' experience on public procurements for evaluation services. The MA, with the support of the JS, will ensure an impartial and transparent selection process, in full compliance with the applicable public procurement rules. Lessons learnt from INTERACT group and during 2014-2020 programming period on evaluation shall also be taken into due account as they provide a solid ground and know-how for drawing-up the ToR by building on other Programmes' experiences. The ToR will define, among others, the objectives of the evaluations, the role and responsibilities of the evaluators, the description of the evaluation assignment and work flow, the duration of the contract and the resources to be allocated. Moreover, it will also include the specification of evaluation questions and the estimation of data requirements. The draft ToR will be presented to the MC for acknowledgment.

### 2. Involvement of partners in the evaluation

In accordance with the multi-level governance approach and in compliance with the principle of partnership, the European code of conduct on partnership, the Programme promotes the engagement of its stakeholders in the design and implementation of the evaluation plan whenever possible. In particular, relevant partners, main stakeholders and target groups (e.g. national, regional and local public authorities, economic and social partners, bodies representing the civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organizations, higher education and research institutions), beyond their involvement as evaluation stakeholders in the National Committees and as non-voting members of the MC, shall be involved also in the evaluation of the Programme. Their participation to the Programme evaluation phase could be attained also thanks to the work of National Committees having the role to support MC members not only in the execution of MC tasks but also in the monitoring, provision of data for the measurement of Programme indicators as well as Programme evaluation. As already mentioned, besides the involvement of the relevant national partners, also a broad range of other stakeholders' categories will be consulted, through surveys and interviews, in the collection of data which will serve as an input for the operational and impact evaluation.

### 3. Evaluation expertise

The evaluations will be carried out by both internal evaluators with relevant skills acquired in the last programming period as well as by an external evaluation team. Internal and external evaluators must ensure the functional independence from the authorities responsible for Programme implementation (Article 35 (3) of Interreg Regulation).



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The MA will deploy the monitoring and evaluation office expertise to perform some support activities and , in addition, the Programme Bodies have a good understanding of evaluation methods and will support the on-going evaluation activities of the Programme, especially through the work of the EWG.

In the process of selection of the external evaluation team, the quality of the proposed expert pool and methodological approach will be given the highest possible weight compared to the offered price of the service. The evaluators will be provided with monitoring data taken from the Joint Electronic and Monitoring System (JEMS), the new monitoring system adopted by the Programme, as well as internal data collection.

A continuous and possibly fruitful exchange between the external evaluation team and the MA/JS is foreseen in order to provide the evaluators with up-to-date information and practical insights into Programme implementation as well as to build a common understanding of the Programme, common terminology and to avoid misunderstandings.

### 4. Planned training activities related to the evaluation process

Training activities that can support the evaluation process and increase evaluation capacities in the MA and JS will be carried out. The MA and JS will actively contribute to the exchange and sharing of information with other Interreg Programmes through the participation in the evaluation network which is facilitated by INTERACT and other Mainstream Managing authorities during activities designed by NUVAP (Italian national evaluation unit). Furthermore, MA and JS will closely follow the guidance and trainings on evaluation provided by the EC.

In addition, exchange with other Interreg Programmes on the evaluation approaches and process will be continued.

A training activity for MA and JS staff will be also envisaged as a task of the external evaluation team on specific training needs.

### 5. Use and communication of evaluations

The MA will illustrate the evaluation reports and discuss with the MC the findings and recommendations made by the evaluators in order to reach the approval by MC of each evaluation report and an agreement on the necessary follow-up actions to be undertaken at Programme level.

Once approved, the evaluation reports will be made available to the public on the Programme website, as requested at the Interreg Regulation art. 35(2), and their content used in Programme communication to target groups and main stakeholders. Synthesis of main findings in a catchy format will also be provided and published.





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In addition, the Programme will actively promote the findings of evaluations through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. through annual event, thematic workshops for beneficiaries, policy makers and other stakeholders, the use of social media and community development, whenever relevant) in order to strengthen the evaluation capacity within the relevant stakeholders.

#### 6. Quality management strategy for the evaluation process

The MA is responsible for the coordination and steering of the Programme evaluation and will safeguard that it is conducted in a professional and ethical manner in compliance with the principles of impartiality and independence of evaluators. In order to ensure high quality of Programme evaluations, the Programme already set up a quality management strategy for the evaluation process. This will be further enhanced.

With regards to the External Evaluator selection, a selection committee in charge for the evaluation of the bids will be appointed. Clear award criteria and quality requirements will be defined in the ToR: they will relate in particular to professional and technical capacity in evaluation, previous experience in similar activities and methodological approach proposed. Evaluators will be required to use a sound methodology in the performance of their tasks. In the selection process, the quality of the proposed expert pool and methodological approach will be highly weighted.

Moreover, during the implementation of the evaluation exercise, the support to external evaluators and the monitoring of progress will be coordinated by two managers identified as main reference within MA and JS. In addition to the internal evaluator, also the all staff of the MA and JS depending on the scope of the evaluations, will actively contribute to the evaluation exercise. The coordinators within MA and JS will act as main interface with the appointed external evaluation team which, in turn, will be required to set up a clear responsibility structure on their side. Continuous dialogue between the evaluators and the coordinators will be ensured as this is directly linked to the quality and usefulness of evaluation outcomes. Regular meetings (physical or virtual) between the evaluators, the MA and JS will take place.

A kick-off meeting with the evaluators will be organized in order to discuss and agree on the evaluation process and work flow of each evaluation output, including identification of data sources and the setting of intermediate steps, deliverables and deadlines for reporting.

The overall expected outputs produced by the evaluators for each type of evaluation to be carried out consist of the following:

- **Integrated Evaluation Design (IED):** which will be based on the detailed methodology for carrying out the evaluation tasks as defined in the ToR and the typology of data and sources of information. The IED will



include also a working plan concerning the whole duration of the contract and a detailed time plan of each deliverable of the evaluation activities. The IED will be updated for each contract year;

- **Intermediate report:** which will provide an overview of the evaluation work carried out, intermediate results achieved and/or results of some specific evaluation tasks in accordance with the due dates as laid down in the ToR and/or the inception report.
- **Final evaluation report:** which will provide a comprehensive picture of the evaluation including its context and objectives, evaluation methods and information sources. In addition, it will present the results, conclusions and recommendations on all evaluation questions as defined in the ToR and further detailed in the inception report. It will also include an executive summary.

The MA and JS will closely follow the work of the evaluators and will carry out the necessary quality checks and provide precise feedback to the evaluators. Among others, they will ensure that the analysis has been carried out in an appropriate way and will verify the evidence for supporting the presented findings and recommendations. In case of insufficient quality, they will intervene accordingly and, if the case, apply the clause regulating the early termination of the contract conditional on the quality of the work provided. In addition, the MA and JS will coordinate the exchange with the relevant Programme Authorities and partners such as MC members, national contact points, Programme beneficiaries, etc.

Finally, to further enhance quality control, all final evaluation reports will be made available to the MC for comments and revisions. If considered necessary, evaluators will present and discuss evaluation results within MC meetings. Any report submitted by the evaluators will undergo the quality management procedures set in place in order to be accepted by the MA, as contracting body.

## 7. Timing of relevant Programme implementation phases and of the evaluation deliverables

The following timetable shows in the upper part the launch of each Call for Proposals and the envisaged timing of approval of the projects and in the lowest part when the Programme foresees the publication of each evaluation deliverable. The timeline of the Programme implementation is duly considered while setting the timing of evaluations.

It is very important that the timing of evaluations during the programming period is balanced. As a general rule, it should be scheduled as late as possible to enable the availability of results, but also as early as possible to allow feedback and adjustment mechanisms of the findings of evaluation in the overall Programme implementation process.





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	2022		2023		2024		2025		2026		2027		2028		2029	
	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12	01-06	07-12
	Calls															
Standard		1st CFP														
										1st CFP Results	1st CFP Results					
						3rd CFP										
													3rd CFP Results	3rd CFP Results		
						4th CFP										
														4th CFP Results	4th CFP Results	
										5th CFP Capitalisation						
															5th CFP Capitalisation	5th CFP Capitalisation
Small P.		1st CFP														
								1st CFP Results								
						3rd CFP										
										3rd CFP Results						
OSI				2nd CFP												
												2nd CFP Results	2nd CFP Results			
	Evaluations															
Internal Analysis			Internal Operational Monitoring	1st Operational Evaluation on Standard and Small P. Calls			Internal Operational Monitoring				Internal Operational Monitoring					
Operational Evaluation								2nd Operational Evaluation on Standard and Small P. Calls				3rd Operational Evaluation on all Calls				
Impact										Midterm Impact Evaluation					Final Impact Evaluation	
Additional and other Programming Period Evaluations					Impact Evaluation 14-20					(1st 21-27 Additional Evaluation)				Territorial and Socioeconomic Analysis 28-34		(2nd 28-34 Additional Evaluation)

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The timing for evaluations will thus need to be shaped according to the different Programme implementation phases (see table above). Lessons learnt and previous experience accumulated during the 2014-2020 external evaluator contract development, suggest not to be too precise in anticipating contents, type and timing of the different evaluations and to keep the required flexibility that might allow to better tackle Programme needs arising during the Programme lifecycle. This shall not disregard the mandatory requirements of Art. 35 (1)(2) of the CPR<sup>1</sup>.

The scope and subject, evaluation questions, tasks and expected results of the single evaluations will be defined separately upon need.

Having considered the size and scope of the Programme, the illustrated timing of main Programme implementation phases and the content of the first Operational evaluation foreseen, as well as the necessary time needed to procure the evaluation services, no evaluations with the support of external experts are planned before the beginning of 2024. However, in 2023 a first internal Operational evaluation is foreseen (see above).

Moreover, taking into consideration the estimated duration of the evaluations (see the table above), **one single tender** for operational and impact evaluation shall be envisaged in order to have a unique contract with an evaluation team to be performed in a coherent and continuous manner. Detailed information and description on the evaluations planned for the Programme can be found in Section V of the evaluation plan. Anyhow, a second tender might be envisaged for the foreseen territorial and socioeconomic analysis given their peculiar characteristics.

### 8. Evaluation provisional budget

The financial resources for all the evaluation activities will be covered by the Technical Assistance budget.

The total amount foreseen for the external evaluation planned is **EUR 335,000.00** where the first tender with impact evaluation for the period 2014-2020 amounts to 80,000.00 EUR, the second tender with the two operational evaluations and the impact evaluation for the period 2021-2027 and 1 additional evaluation amounts to 215.000 EUR and a possible third tender with 1 additional evaluation amounts to 40.000 EUR.

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<sup>1</sup> “1. The Member State or the managing authority shall carry out evaluations of the programmes related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme.

2. In addition to the evaluations referred to in paragraph 1, an evaluation for each programme to assess its impact shall be carried out by 30 June 2029.”



## SECTION IV: PLANNED EVALUATIONS

### 1. Overview of planned evaluations

All the evaluations shall be useful for all the relevant stakeholders: not only Programme Bodies and governing ones, but also for the beneficiaries and, if possible, the wider public otherwise their feedback will lack quality and required depth. This might affect the general quality of data collected at a Programme level both for quantitative and qualitative analysis developed. Given the cost of the evaluation process there is a general need of capitalisation of all the information collected in implementation phase.

Therefore, the Programme foresees:

- 1 Impact Evaluation on Interreg Programme Italy Croatia 14-20,
- 3 Internal Operational Evaluations and two external ones,
- 1 Impact Evaluation,
- 2 Additional Evaluations.

Among the pool of possible evaluation criteria indicated in art. 35 Reg. 1059/2021: *“effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of Programmes. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme;”* some have been identified as the most relevant to be assessed for IT-HR Programme evaluations:

- **Relevance:** In the context of an evaluation, the term "relevance" refers to the appropriateness of the program's specific objectives in connection to the socioeconomic issues it is intended to solve. Since selecting the optimal strategy or defending the one that has been suggested is the main goal of ex ante evaluation, relevance questions are the most crucial. The goal of intermediate evaluation is to determine if the socioeconomic situation has changed as anticipated and whether this evolution calls a certain target into question. At this point, it is crucial to guarantee that programs are relevant to user demands, and assessment can help with that. This relevance-related input is not limited to program design at one particular period. Numerous socio-economic development projects depend on ongoing feedback from (potential and current) users and other stakeholders to maintain their viability. It is typical to have an explicit reprogramming moment. It could also entail determining eligibility so that specific interventions can be compared against criteria to confirm their applicability to a larger program or set of rules.
- **Coherence:** is the program's logic coherent, and its interventions and implementation chains are plausible? Agreement between an intervention's goals and those of other public initiatives that affect it. It can be claimed that there is external coherence if a national policy and an EU socioeconomic program are executed in tandem in the same territory with the goal of developing SMEs.



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- **Effectiveness:** the term effectiveness refers to the degree to which the program's goals are being attained, the successes and challenges encountered, the appropriateness of the solutions selected, and the impact of external factors originating from outside the program.
- **Sustainability/durability/transferability:** relates to how long-lasting the intervention's outcomes and results are. Evaluations frequently take socioeconomic effects and the sustainability of institutional changes into account (The concept of sustainable development, which is related to the criterion of sustainability, can be seen as one definition of utility [please see details in the Impact Evaluation Section] in and of itself, especially if it is defined as involving the preservation of human, productive, natural, and social capitals rather than just the preservation of the environment for future generations).
- **Communication** (internal): the internal evaluators will investigate the Programme ability to communicate both to the potential beneficiaries and to the beneficiaries; they also will analyze the contribution of the Programme in the publicizing interventions to the general public.
- **Efficiency** (internal): as relationship between objectives achieved and resources deployed will be investigated in particular for the project selection process, for the use of the Simplified Cost Options and for the using technical support.

For each of these criteria, some evaluation domains (specific evaluable aspects) have been identified and for each of them one Evaluation Question (EQ) has been defined. The number of EQs foreseen is limited on purpose with the aim of reducing the spectrum of possible topics to evaluate and thus allow a deeper and sounder analysis of the covered topic, while in the Terms of Reference IEs will have room to purpose additional ones (guaranteeing the same level of analysis depth and without dissipating evaluation resources).

Some Evaluation Criteria have been considered suitable to be assessed within the internal evaluation activities such as: communication and efficiency. Some aspects of efficiency will be tackled, as per the following EQs, within other criteria. The list of the indicative topics covered and the relevant EQs is detailed below.

Evaluation Criteria	Specific Evaluable Aspects	Evaluation questions
Relevance	Relevance of individual interventions with respect to sectoral needs	To what extent Is the Programme properly addressing the current general and sectorial development needs in the Programme area, including allocation of financial resources?
	Relevance to cross-border needs	To what extent is the programme addressing the main cross-border challenges of the area including allocation of financial resources?



	Correspondence with stakeholders' expectations	To what extent are the interventions of the programme in line with the expectations of the territorial stakeholders?
	Ability of the program to adapt to the evolution of needs over time	Are the Programme objectives still relevant, consistent and complementary in the evolving economic, social and policy context?
		How effectively has the programme been able to adapt to such evolutions?
	Any unidentified/covered needs (merge with previous)	Are there any stringent needs that have not been covered by the Programme? Could they be covered by the present programme? How?
Coherence	Consistency with other FESI programmes/other funds	Which kind of synergies with other Interreg and mainstream programmes involving the cooperation area have been activated, at programme and project level?
		To what extent such synergies produce enhanced results in terms of integration and complementarities and what is the Italy-Croatia Interreg Programme added value?
	Consistency with macro-regional strategies	To what extent has Italy-Croatia CBC Programme contributed to EUSAIR and other macroregional strategies? The solutions adopted by the Programme in order to support the implementation of the EUSAIR through the projects have been effective?
	Capitalization of previous results and outputs	To what extent have the projects funded by the programme capitalised on results and deliverables of projects funded in the previous programming period and/or by other Interreg Programmes?
		What are the premises, conditions and mechanisms which lead to a maximisation of such capitalization?
Effectiveness	Ability to achieve pre-set results at specific goal level	To what extent has the Programme achieved its general and specific objectives?
		What are the perspectives about the capacity of the Programme to completely reach its objectives by the end of the



		implementation period? Should corrective measures be considered?
	Possible more effective intervention alternatives	Could objectives be reached in a more effective/efficient way? Are there more effective/efficient alternatives that the programme management system could consider?
	Problem and success factors	<p>Considering the overall programme management cycle, which are the main challenges faced by the programme management system in each of the phases (project generation, selection, contracting, monitoring, reporting, financial management, verifications and audit)? Have they been tackled effectively?</p> <p>Are there significant bottlenecks for smooth programme implementation? How can they be removed?</p> <p>Considering the overall programme management cycle, which are the programme management processes, mechanisms and solutions which most contributed to a smooth and efficient implementation of the programme?</p>
	Common problems in project implementation	What are the major difficulties faced by the beneficiaries? What measures could be taken to overcome them?
	Models (patterns) for a successful implementation at the project level	<p>Are there any patterns that could be identified for the successful implementation of the various categories of project?</p> <p>Are these patterns properly recognized and supported by the project selection criteria?</p>
	Degree of preparation/ability of the beneficiaries	<p>Are the beneficiaries sufficiently prepared and equipped to prepare projects and implement them? Which are the main areas for improvement?</p> <p>Are the initiatives to support them effective?</p>
	Cross-border added value. <i>Only operational. Impact-related CB added value moved under impact</i>	<p>To what extent selected projects present a cross-border character and added value?</p> <p>Are partnerships and project activities</p>



		organized so to minimize the presence of “mirror projects”?
Impact	Impact assessment for each single specific objective	What is the progress of the programme area in... [ <i>specific objective formulation</i> ]
		To what extent has the Programme contributed to such progress?
		What are the factors facilitating that contribution?
		Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?
		What is the additional value resulting from the Cross-border intervention, as compared to what could reasonably have been expected from the two Member States acting separately?
	Macroeconomic impact assessment (area socio-economic indicators)	What is the current and estimated aggregated effect of the programme on the eligible area in terms of contribution to its socio-economic development?
Sustainability/ Durability/ Transferability	Durability of results by type of intervention	Are the projects’ outputs and results sustainable on long term? Which factors enhance or condition such sustainability for the various types of projects funded?
	Dependence on public funding, ability to generate private funding (leverage)	What is the projects’ capacity to leverage private funding for the follow up of their output/results after their closure?
Communication (Internal)	Communication to potential beneficiaries	To what extent the communication strategy has contributed to improve the knowledge on EU funds and the CBC Programme objectives and opportunities in the cooperation area?



		Were communication tools effective in increasing awareness on Programme objectives and offered opportunities?
	Communication to beneficiaries	Have the Programme communication measures reached the relevant target groups efficiently?
	Publicizing interventions to the general public	Has the Programme contributed to increase the capacity of projects to communicate their own achievements?
Efficiency	Efficiency of the management system (times and consistency of procedures, human resources employed) in the various phases: project generation, selection, contracting, monitoring, closure, control and management of irregularities	Is the overall management and control system effective? What can be improved? How efficient and effective are the Programme management bodies (MA, CA, JS, MC, FLC) in the implementation of their functions? What can be improved?
	Use of SCOs	Did the use of simplified cost options prove to be efficient?
	Using Technical Support	How efficient are application procedures and tools (access to the JEMS online application system, JEMS user's manual and application package: factsheets, glossary, templates, online tools and utilities)? Do they guarantee clear and complete information on the application process and do they succeed in limiting administrative burdens on applicants?
		How efficient is the Programme monitoring system? What can be improved?
	Efficiency of the selection procedure	How efficient are the project generation, selection and contracting processes with specific reference to each typology of call (capitalization, standard and strategic)?
	Existence of more efficient intervention alternatives	Are there any steps in the use of Technical Assistance funds that could be made more efficient? Are there any steps in the use of allocated beneficiary funds that could be made more efficient?





The evaluations' framework is summarized in the following table and detailed in the following chapters of the Evaluation plan:

<p><b>Subject and rationale</b></p>	<p><b>Operational:</b> Aimed at appraising the Programme relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability throughout the implementation period, through the issuing of <b>two evaluation reports</b>. Evaluation analysis are expected to highlight both strengths and bottlenecks detected during implementation and propose suggestions for improvement.</p> <p>The first users of all the evaluation findings will be the Programme bodies with particular reference to the MA and JS, that will share and agree on the necessary follow-up actions to be undertaken at Programme level.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> With the objective to assess the Programme (initial and medium term) impacts on the cooperation area and beneficiaries, at Programme and Specific Objective levels, and drawing lessons learnt in the current programming period. In this framework, particular attention will be also paid to the CBC added value and the CP specific contribution to macro-regional strategies.</p> <p>The first users of all the evaluation findings will be the Programme bodies with particular reference to the MA and JS, that will share and agree on the necessary follow-up actions to be undertaken at Programme level. In addition, the Programme will promote the findings of evaluations through different communication activities as foreseen in the communication strategy with the twofold objective to disseminate evaluation results and strengthen relevant stakeholders' evaluation capacities.</p> <p><b>Additional:</b> that may be deemed useful in case of emerging urgent needs, for instance, where monitoring reveals a significant gap from the goals initially set or where specific needs of sectorial analysis will emerge during the implementation period. <b>One of these additional evaluations is foreseen under the present contract.</b> Its specific scope will be defined by the Contracting authority in collaboration with the selected provider, indicatively to be delivered by the end of year 2027.</p> <p>evaluation activities will be focused on the <b>following evaluation themes and specific aspects:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Programme relevance.</b> The evaluation should assess the degree to which the Programme is consistent with the main <b>territorial needs and expectations</b> to be tackled. Aspects to be analysed refer to the relevance of the Programme with the needs of the sector to which it is addressed, with the main cross-border challenges of the area and with the</li> </ul>
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expectations of the main stakeholders. Moreover, the evaluation should focus on the capacity of the programme to adapt to the evolution of the tackled needs and on its possibility to cover initially undetected and stringent needs arising on the territory.

- **Programme coherence.** The attention of the evaluation effort is on the external coherence of the programme with other relevant strategies and plans of public intervention, as well as with the results achieved by the programme of the previous period, on which it should logically capitalize. Accordingly, specific aspects to analyse include the coherence of the interventions – at programme and project level – with other Interreg and mainstream programmes involving the cooperation area, its coherence with the relevant macro-regional strategies (EUSAIR in particular), the capacity of the Programme and its projects to capitalize on results achieved during the 2014-2020 period, either by its predecessor or by other relevant Interreg programmes.
- **Programme effectiveness.** Under this evaluation theme, the evaluator is required to assess the degree in which expected results have been reached and to explain the mechanisms that led to this success/unsuccess. Effectiveness should be assessed under a two-folded approach focusing respectively on the macro (programme) level and on the micro (projects) level. Aspects of analysis will include, for the macro level: the capacity of the Programme in reaching the expected results at the level of each specific objective, the possible existence of more effective alternative of interventions that could be considered for the future, the identification of problematic aspects – as well as success choices - in the programme management phases; for the micro level, the evaluator will investigate the possible existence of common project implementation issues, detect the existence of patterns for a smooth and successful project implementation, assess the degree of preparation and capacity of the beneficiaries to propose and implement project as well as the degree of cross-border added value brought by the projects financed by the programme..
- **Programme impact:** the evaluation should establish the effects of the Programme on the long -term and/or on a wider range of subjects than the immediate beneficiaries of the actions, for each of the domains covered by its specific objectives. Moreover, the evaluation should possibly detect the possible contribution of the programme on the general macro-economic development dynamics of the covered area.
- **Programme sustainability.** The evaluation will assess the extent to which projects' outputs and results are sustainable in the long term, identify



	the factors that favour/condition their durability and the capacity of the projects to leverage private funding so to generate changes that are autonomous from the continuous availability of public support.
Methods to be used and their data requirements	<p>Given the evaluation overall purpose and specific themes and aspects covered, it is <b>recommended to adopt a theory-based approach</b> aiming to assess whether the assumptions and predictions made during the programming phase are still valid (evaluation of the Programme theory of change) and appraising at what extent, how and the reasons why the Italy-Croatia CBC Programme is achieving its objectives and producing the expected changes in the cooperation area.</p> <p>This approach should be addressed to investigate the causal linkages between given inputs, activities and obtained outputs and results (including possible unintended and unpredictable effects) with the aim, on one side, to detect and tackle possible criticalities for improving implementation and, on the other, to collect useful hints and evidence-based information to build the future Cooperation Programme.</p> <p>Moreover, in line with the Programme cross-border nature, it is requested to make use of <b>participatory methods foreseeing the balanced involvement of Programme bodies, relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries from both sides of the border.</b></p> <p>The use of a <b>combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods and tools is required.</b> In addition to desk analysis (i.e. literary review, overview of monitoring data, collecting statistical information at national and regional levels, etc), field research-based evaluation tools like interviews, case studies, surveys have to be foreseen.</p> <p>Experts will be invited to make <b>their own proposal on the choice of methods</b> deemed most suitable for the evaluation purpose for each evaluation theme/aspect/question, <b>by combining the minimal compulsory methods established in the future ToRs, with possible additional ones.</b></p> <p>The completeness and effectiveness of the range of methods proposed will be a <b>scoring criterion</b> for the evaluation of the Independent Evaluators' offers.</p>
Data availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data exported from the managing and monitoring system;</li> <li>• statistical data deriving from other regional and external databases;</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• data deriving from communication tools and activities (surveys results, web analytics...);</li> <li>• communication documents and other programme-related materials considered relevant for evaluation purposes.</li> </ul> <p>Additional and/or specific data sources (including other existing databases) will be shared and agreed by the MA/JS and the selected evaluator during the inception phase.</p>
Duration and a tentative date	Please refer to the Gannt Above
Estimated budget	<p><b>Operational:</b> with regards to the first operational evaluation, as it will refer to the start-up fare of the programming period and it is foreseen to be internally carried on it will be at cost zero for the Programme. Concerning the two external Operational Evaluation the indicative budget is: 40.000€ each.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> for the 14-20 impact evaluation 80.000€; for the 21-27 the estimated budget is 135.000€.</p> <p><b>Additional:</b> 40.000€.</p>

## 2. Operational Evaluation

The operational evaluations timeline and scope are thought to tackle potential gaps to be considered for the subsequent Calls for Proposals. Furthermore, it will allow integrating findings on Programme management settings and communication activities in view of immediate response and respective follow-up measures to any identified weaknesses.

The Programme and the evaluators will conduct operational evaluations, in which multiple projects are selected for comprehensive and cross-sectoral evaluation and analysis; specific development issues and assistance methods are also chosen for evaluation. The first operational evaluation will be conducted only by the internal evaluators, while the second and the third operational evaluations will be produced in a collaborative way by both internal and external evaluators.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that in the second operational evaluation the Programme foresees a unique deliverable including the evaluation produced by the collaboration of internal and external evaluators and the first impact evaluation done by the external evaluation team.

The evaluation criteria are detailed in the first paragraph of Section IV.  
Some of the concrete evaluation principles are:



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- understanding operation process to bring out success factors;
- performing a critical analysis of the operation and its results, especially comparisons to global objectives;
- making results reliable and visible, especially towards partners and final publics targeted;
- quantification of final results;
- proportionality and practicality.

The recommended approach is to use mixed methods: both qualitative and quantitative methods because of the diversity of issues addressed (e.g., population, type of projects, and goals).

The choice of methods should fit the need for the evaluation, its timeline, and available resources (Holland et al., 2005; Steckler et al., 1992)<sup>2</sup>.

When it comes to queries like "How many," "Who was engaged," "What were the outcomes," and "How much did it cost," quantitative data offer information that can be counted. Pretests and posttests, surveys, questionnaires, observation, database reviews, and clinical data collection are all methods for acquiring quantitative data. Surveys can be performed face-to-face, over the phone, by mail or online. Analyzing quantitative data requires statistical analysis, ranging from simple descriptive statistics to more sophisticated investigations.

Quantitative data evaluate an implementation's breadth and depth (e.g., the number of people who participated, the number of people who completed the course, etc.). Quantitative information gathered prior to and during an intervention can demonstrate its results and effects. If the sample accurately represents the community, generalizability, ease of analysis, consistency, and precision are all advantages of quantitative data for evaluation purposes (if collected reliably). Poor survey response rates, trouble getting records, and challenges in reliable measurement can all be drawbacks of using quantitative data for evaluation. Quantitative statistics may not be robust enough to explain complicated difficulties or interconnections, and they also do not provide a grasp of the context of the Programme.

Questions like "What is the value added?" "Who was responsible?" and "When did this happen?" are addressed by qualitative data. Direct or participant observation, interviews, focus groups, case studies, and written materials are all used to gather qualitative data. Analyses of qualitative data include evaluating, comparing and contrasting, and understanding patterns. Identification of themes, coding, grouping related data, and condensing data to relevant and significant points are likely to be part of analysis, as in grounded theory construction or other qualitative analytic techniques.

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<sup>2</sup> Holland, R., Battersby, J., Harvey, I., Lenaghan, E., Smith, J., & Hay, L. (2005). *Systematic review of multidisciplinary interventions in heart failure*. *Heart*, 91(7), 899-906.

Steckler, A., McLeroy, K. R., Goodman, R. M., Bird, S. T., & McCormick, L. (1992). *Toward integrating qualitative and quantitative methods: An introduction*. *Health education quarterly*, 19(1), 1-8.



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Because the observer can see what is actually happening, observations may aid in explaining behaviors as well as social context and meanings. Watching a participant, filming an intervention, or even getting individuals to "think aloud" while they work are all examples of observations.

Interviews can be conducted one-on-one or in groups, and they are particularly helpful for examining difficult subjects. A loose collection of questions asked in an open-ended way can be used to conduct interviews, or they can be organized and done under controlled circumstances. With the necessary authorizations, it may be beneficial to audiotape interviews in order to facilitate the examination of themes or material. Some interviews have a particular focus, such a crucial episode that the subject recalls and elaborates on. The perceptions and motives of the interviewee are the subject of a different kind of interview.

A facilitator oversees a discussion among a group of people who have been chosen because they have particular qualities during focus groups (e.g. they were beneficiaries of the Programme being evaluated). Participants in focus groups respond to the facilitator's open-ended questions by sharing their thoughts and observations. The benefit of this approach is that themes cascade while debate takes place, generating ideas and jogging memories.

One of the advantages of qualitative data is that they can explain difficult situations contextually and can supplement quantitative data by illuminating the "why" and "how" behind the "what." Lack of generalizability, the time- and money-intensive nature of data gathering, and the challenging and complicated nature of data analysis and interpretation are some potential drawbacks of using qualitative data for evaluation.

### 3. Impact Evaluation

The main goal of the planned impact evaluation is to assess the effects of the Programme implementation to the cross-border regional development and to analyse the mechanisms producing the impact. The challenges of the impact evaluation clearly lie in distinguishing the **effects of Programme implementation** from the contribution of other external factors (such as other EU co-financed Programmes, socio-economic developments, political changes, etc.).

In line with art. 35(2) of Interreg Regulation which requires that *"an evaluation for each Programme to assess its impact shall be carried out by 30 June 2029"* the impact evaluation shall cover the Programme thematic priorities 1 to 5 and their specific objectives.





As further specified in the previous Programme Evaluation Plan, *“in the 2014-2020 programming period, both result orientation and thematic concentration make it necessary to design programmes focusing their resources on a few objectives in order to maximize their impact; their expected results shall be measured with result indicators and the Programme effects assessed with impact evaluations”*. Consequently, the impact evaluation envisaged during the programming period will concentrate on the identification of changes linked to the Programme funding, on estimating the impact of these changes as well as on proposing some lessons learnt on what was more effective and efficient towards the attainment of set objectives.

Moreover, as detailed in Italian Law n° 106, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016<sup>3</sup> the concept of Impact shall be considered in a broader way too: as **fallout for the reference group**.

Although addressing the range of services provided by the Programme, the evaluation's goal is to assess the Programme impact in light of its unique objectives. The evaluation should assess the effects of Programme services in the areas targeted by the specific objectives and should pay particular attention to evaluating how Programme services have helped Interreg Programmes modify their practices.

On the one hand, it is anticipated that the impact evaluation's findings will help the Programme bodies better understand the effects the Programme has on the target populations via which it delivers its services. Analysis of both direct and indirect effects as well as the magnitude of the impact of various services is necessary to identify differences in the added value that each service provides. On the other hand, the review needs to provide examples of successes and evidence that demonstrates what has worked well.

As a result, material derived from the assessment (evaluation conclusions and suggestions, examples of success stories) should promote informed Programme decisions based on the evaluation results and enhance communication about the Programme achievements and potential consequences of its interventions on the groups it is trying to reach. The evaluation's findings are anticipated to be used as guidance for Programme service delivery, specifically for the operational rollout of upcoming services. The criterion of utility judges the impacts obtained by the Programme in relation to broader societal and economic needs. Utility is a very particular evaluation criterion insofar as it makes no reference to the official objectives of the Programme. It may be judicious to formulate a question of utility when Programme objectives are badly defined or when there are many unexpected impacts. This criterion must nevertheless be used with caution to ensure that the evaluation team's selection of important needs or

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<sup>3</sup> Law 06th June 2016 n. 106: *“Per valutazione dell’impatto [...] si intende la valutazione qualitativa e quantitativa, sul breve, medio e lungo periodo, degli effetti delle attività svolte sulla comunità di riferimento rispetto all’obiettivo individuato”*.

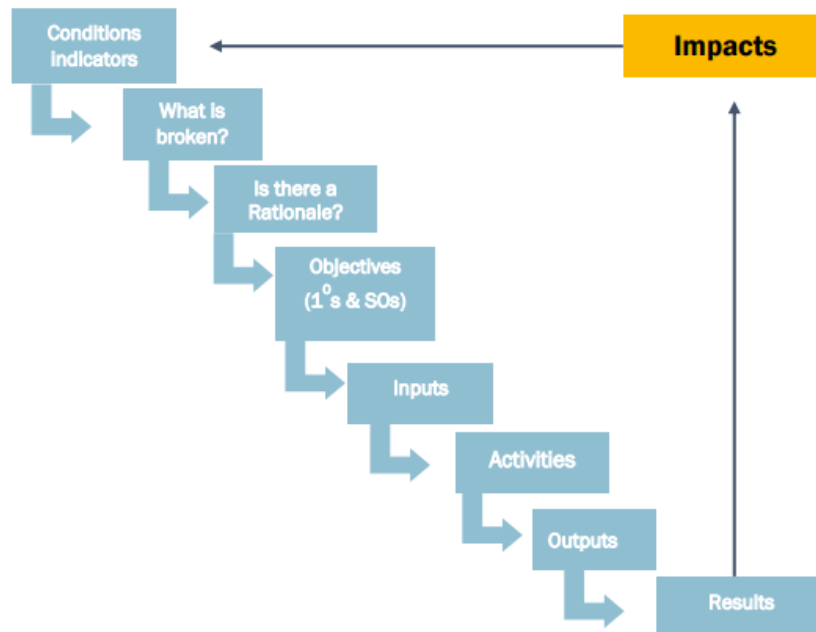


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issues is not too subjective. One way of safeguarding against this risk is to involve other stakeholders, and in particular, intended beneficiaries in the selection of utility questions.

The logic chain of the evaluation shall follow, in principle, the model below:

**Logic model - the 'Building Blocks'**



#### Indicative list of methods to be used and data to be made available to evaluators

Tenderers must detail in their proposals the instruments and procedures they intend to utilize for the impact evaluation. In order to offer thorough responses to the assessment questions, examples of successes, conclusions, and recommendations, the proposed methodology must be the most appropriate and efficient.

It is recommended to utilize a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the strategy can change based on the evaluation questions. However, the bidders must make sure that the data collection includes consultation with a representative sample of Programme stakeholders (beneficiaries, Programme bodies, target group, EUSAIR structures, etc.).

Together with desk research into pertinent documents, data analysis, and other techniques, it is anticipated that methods like surveys, interviews, focus groups, and/or similar will be used.

There are trade-offs when selecting a method. Nonexperimental techniques are more widely used in general. But these techniques could be subject to estimation biases because of sample choice (not having a perfect control) and model definition (using incorrect statistical model). Also, because these techniques





frequently include complicated statistical modeling, they frequently call for a lot of data, which raises the cost of the evaluation and increases the complexity of the computation.

Due to the superior quality of the counterfactual evaluation, randomized evaluations have the highest internal validity (known as the "gold standard"). Also, they are rather simple to comprehend and show findings for. They are less expensive than nonexperimental methods since they frequently call for smaller sample sizes. Yet, their applicability might be more limited. For instance, it is highly challenging to conduct randomized reviews of Programmes intended to benefit the majority of the population.

The most effective approaches should be recommended in the tenderers' proposals, together with a description of how various methods will be integrated to achieve the evaluation's goals.

In Section IV, an indicative list of evaluation questions related to impact evaluation is included.

#### 4. Additional Evaluation

As already mentioned, the Commission often encourages Member States and considers a best practice not to limit the evaluation of the impacts of interventions to the ongoing programming period, but to pick up similar interventions from previous periods. For many interventions in fact it takes years before the effects are fully realized (e.g., for large-scale infrastructures, RTD projects), and some interventions extend across several periods. Therefore, the Programme foresees to carry out an additional impact evaluation for the programming period 2014-2020, in order to maximize knowledge on the impact selected projects after two years from their closure. In the Programme logic, this additional impact evaluation could increase the information on the projects and on the beneficiaries. This impact evaluation will be carried out by an External Evaluator contracted with an ad hoc public procurement procedure.

At least other two additional evaluations will be planned and carried out during Programme implementation in order to satisfy emerging needs such as reprogramming and CP modifications, joint evaluations with other funds or Programmes, thematic evaluations also related to Post-2027 perspective. The tool mix to be used for the additional evaluations will be decided upon identification of the specific themes to be investigated by them. Also, the list of specific evaluation question will be defined once the topics of the evaluations will be decided by the Managing Authority, with the support of the Joint Secretariat, and presented to the MC.

