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2020 Update Evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme

Final Report

Prepared by EureConsult, Spatial Foresight and Technopolis Group

Interreg Europe

European Union | European Regional Development Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The key messages emerging from the findings of the three main parts of the 2020 update evaluation of Interreg Europe 2014-2020 can be summarised as follows.

The effectiveness of Interreg Europe projects and the Policy Learning Platform

The evaluation of **Interreg Europe projects** shows that **the achievement of outputs and results is considerable and also largely on track.** Only with regard to the projects' self-defined output and result targets, some deviations indicate that these targets might not always be fully reached. Nevertheless, the contribution that current project achievements are making to Interreg Europe targets for 2023 is already substantial, so that it can be assumed that target values at the level of the specific objectives will in most cases be over-achieved at the end of 2023.

The evaluation of the **Policy Learning Platform (PLP)** shows that the **implementation** of this second pillar of Interreg Europe **is gradually reaching the expected "cruising speed".** At the same time, however, the evaluation shows a mixed picture for output and result achievement. Some output indicators will over-achieve their 2023 target values, whereas other indicators will most likely not reach the final targets. Result monitoring is poor at date, since information is only available for one out of the 9 existing result indicators. Yet, the available information indicates that over 90% of the persons having participated in different PLP events were satisfied.

The evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change

With the update evaluation of 2020, a first time comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change was carried out, for which the methodological basis was conceived and tested already in the mid-term evaluation of 2018.

The **overall approach** of Interreg Europe **for project-level cooperation is adequate and conductive to reaching the stated programme objectives.** In particular, the related cooperation activities (voluntary and obligatory) are perceived as meaningful and useful. They allow initiating comprehensive though project-specific policy learning processes, which lead to an increased capacity of individuals and institutions/organisations as well as between organisations (e.g. "advocacy coalitions" or policy networks). This learning-based capacity increase is the essential prerequisite for a successful implementation of the envisaged policy changes.

Nevertheless, some improvements could and should be made in the new programming period 2021-2027 with regard to the scope of the project-level learning process (esp. stronger anchoring of practice-based learning in phase 2).

The evaluation also showed that **policy improvements coming about as "impact outcomes" are substantial (40% of all envisaged policy improvements).** This type of policy change can be directly and credibly attributed to the activities and outputs of the 258 Interreg Europe projects.

Considering the current scope of the already achieved "impact outcomes", it is even very likely that these policy changes will account for a larger part of the programme results to be reached at the end of 2023. The decisive factor for this success is that a sufficiently large number of institutions or organisations with direct responsibility for the addressed policy instruments are directly involved in projects as partners.

Interreg Europe projects also implement a wide range of policy improvements that are coming about as "influence outcomes" (60% of all envisaged policy improvements). These policy changes differ from "impact outcomes" in that they are achieved with more or less significant contributions coming from project-external factors.

This external contribution originates mainly from the fact that institutions or organisations with direct responsibility for the addressed policy instruments are not directly involved as partners in projects. Policy changes achieved as "influence outcomes" can therefore not entirely be regarded as a direct contribution to the expected result of Interreg Europe. An immediate contribution to policy change only emerges from variable direct project effects, which are also a part of each "influence outcome".

However, at least the policy improvements including high direct project effects should be assimilated to "impact outcomes". According to a cautious initial estimation, these improvements can also contribute significantly to the programme results expected for 2023.

Although the **Policy Learning Platform** is the second and strategically important pillar of Interreg Europe, it **does not directly contribute to a large extent to an improvement of policy instruments.** Limited contribution potentials exist only in case of the PLP peer reviews implemented since 2018.

Through the policy changes initiated by Interreg Europe projects, **the programme does indeed contribute to the achievement of EU-wide policy goals and regional/local development objectives.** However, this contribution is indirect (i.e. not an "impact outcome") since direct changes in the socio-economic or environmental conditions of regions (i.e. territorial effects) only occur after the effective use of improved policy instruments and after a sufficiently long period of application of these instruments.

Nevertheless, strong indirect contributions are to be expected for a better delivery of RIS3 and the promotion of smart growth, and to a slightly lesser extent also for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable growth. All these contributions together will differently influence EU-wide territorial cohesion: partly by strengthening the already strong position of more developed regions (especially in the field of research, development and innovation), and partly also by creating potentials that will enable less developed or transition regions to catch up with more developed regions.

The operational evaluation of Interreg Europe

The operational evaluation shows that **the management and operational level of the current Interreg Europe programme works fine and is evolving and growing with its tasks.** As the context of the programme and the programme itself evolve, there are constantly possibilities for adjustments and improvements.

However, there is no need for changing the management and operational routines. As there are no formal reasons for change, the operational evaluation is merely raising possible points for reflection that may help the future Interreg Europe programme to ensure it evolves along the desired lines.

1   Introduction

This is the final report on the 2020 evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme, which updates the mid-term evaluation carried out in 2018. This report is more than a presentation of facts, because it "tells the story" of how Interreg Europe works in practice and what results are achieved through its interventions. But how is that story told and what does it actually deal with?

This final report covers the **two main themes** addressed by the former lots 1 and 2 of the 2018 mid-term evaluation, since the terms of reference (ToR) for the 2020 update evaluation requested that services to be provided shall be similar to those of the mid-term evaluation

- **An updated evaluation of contributions to the results and objectives of Interreg Europe ("Results Evaluation"),** which looks at both the effectiveness of the programme and its impact on policy change. A methodological note was elaborated for this part of the update evaluation in order to clarify a number of aspects relating to the use of quantitative data from the programme monitoring system iDB (**see: Annex I**).

- **An updated evaluation of the operational context of Interreg Europe ("Operational Evaluation"),** which should primarily focus on formulating recommendations for the next programming period 2021-2027.

These two main themes were addressed by **three evaluation tasks:** the effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 1) and a comprehensive evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change (Task 2) as well as the operational evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 3). The analysis carried out under these tasks was conceived in a way to fully address all evaluation questions and requirements raised in the ToR for the 2020 update evaluation (**see: Annex II**).

The first two chapters present the findings of the updated effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 1). This effectiveness evaluation shows what interregional cooperation projects and the Policy Learning Platform are currently undertaking and have already achieved for reaching the stated programme objectives.

- **Chapter 2** evaluates the **effectiveness of the 184 projects approved after the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls** of the Interreg Europe programme. It analyses the current output and result achievement of these projects for selected indicators, both in a programme-wide perspective across the six specific objectives (SOs) of Interreg Europe and at the level of each SO.

- **Chapter 3** evaluates the **effectiveness of the Policy Learning Platform (PLP)** established under Interreg Europe and covers all PLP-related monitoring indicators. The analysis is carried out in a programme-wide perspective and considers, where possible, also achievements at the level of the four thematic PLP-sections.

Nevertheless, the findings of this effectiveness evaluation are not yet providing precise information about the extent to which Interreg Europe has a real impact on changing the addressed national, regional or local policies for territorial development. This to uncover was the task of the evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change.

Chapter 4 presents findings of a first time and also comprehensive evaluation of Interreg Europe's expected and current impact on policy change (Task 2). This evaluation consists of five subsequent analytical steps, each of which is looking into a specific element of the Theory of Change that was developed under lot 2 of the 2018 mid-term evaluation[1]. The first step examines the cooperation activities of projects during phase 1 and phase 2. These activities are establishing a policy learning process that increases the capacities of project partner and stakeholder organisations, so that they can better deliver regional or local policies for territorial development (Section 4.2). This "look behind the curtain" of project-level cooperation shall create a better understanding of the second and third steps of the analysis: they examine the projects' contribution to Interreg Europe results that are coming about either as "impact outcomes" (Section 4.3) or as "influence outcomes" (Section 4.4). The fourth step examines possible direct effects of the PLP on policy change, which can emerge if PLP peer reviews are directly contributing to improving regional or local policies implemented by peer review host regions across Europe (Section 4.5). The fifth and last step of the analysis looks at what happens after the addressed policy instruments are improved and actually applied. The focus is on "territorial knock-on-effects" induced by the improved policy instruments, which allow Interreg Europe to make indirect contributions to EU-wide policy goals and other regional or local development objectives (Section 4.6).

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the updated operational evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 3). This update evaluation was carried out on grounds of a comprehensive review of existing literature, two online surveys conducted among project partners (i.e. on programme-level support to projects) and members of Interreg Europe monitoring committee as well as an online focus group organised in June 2020.

Chapter 6 finally presents the overall conclusions and recommendations of the 2020 update evaluation. The conclusions sum up the main findings of the three main evaluation tasks (Chapters 2-5) and also include a brief SWOT analysis of the current Interreg Europe programme that is presented for each of the tasks (Section 6.1). The report ends with a section presenting our recommendations for Interreg Europe (Section 6.2). The section focuses exclusively on the new programming period 2021-2027, since no substantial weaknesses have been found that would require decision-taking by the monitoring committee to eliminate shortcomings effectively in the current programme period.

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[1] See: Evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme (Lot 2), Final Report – Part II, Main findings of the results evaluation, November 2018, pp. 45-62

2 The effectiveness of Interreg Europe projects

2.1 Aim and scope of the effectiveness evaluation of projects

The support of interregional cooperation projects (hereinafter: "projects") is the first pillar of Interreg Europe. Projects are undertaken by partnerships of regional or local players from different countries with a view to foster exchange of experience and sharing of practices as well as to prepare action plans for integrating and deploying good practices within policy instruments for regional development.

The 258 approved Interreg Europe projects address a total of 527 different policy instruments all over Europe: 170 are ERDF-funded Growth and Jobs programmes (79% of all national / regional ERDF programmes approved by the European Commission), 22 are ERDF-funded European territorial cooperation (ETC) programmes and 335 are other local, regional or national policy instruments. Partners of Interreg Europe projects usually work on improving individual parts of the addressed policy instruments (e.g. a priority axis or measure of an ESIF programme; a specific local funding scheme; a legislative framework with no funding attached to it etc.)[2]. These policy improvements should in general emerge from an implementation of action plans in phase 2. However, practice shows that many policy improvements are already achieved in the first phase of project implementation.

Against this background, the aim of the effectiveness evaluation is to determine the extent to which the current outputs and results of projects are helping to reach the six specific objectives (SOs) of Interreg Europe[3]. This question is explored at two levels:

- First, by comparing the currently achieved outputs / results to the planned final target values for outputs / results that projects mentioned in their application forms (see: Section 2.2). This analysis of the performance of projects in reaching their self-determined final target values is possible for all relevant output and result indicators. However, an interpretation of the aggregated performance levels of projects should be done with care since a "statistical bias" may exist in the monitoring data for some indicators. More detailed information on this is given in a methodological note in the annex part of this report (**see: Annex I**).

- Second and more importantly, by determining the contributions that the currently achieved project outputs / results are making to the pre-defined target values for 2023 of the Interreg Europe cooperation programme (see: Section 2.3). The already achieved contribution levels are very important "landmarks" that allow to predict the likely success in reaching the strategic and specific objectives of Interreg Europe until the end of 2023.

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[2] In practice, it is observed that several projects with partners from the same region / country are often improving different elements of one ERDF Growth and Jobs programme. On average, 14 Interreg Europe projects work on improving each of the Growth and Jobs programmes in a country See: https://www.interregeurope.eu/about-us/stats/

[3] Specific objectives on improving innovation infrastructures policies (SO 1.1), innovation delivery policies (SO 1.2), SME competitiveness (SO 2.1), low carbon economy policies (SO 3.1), natural and culture heritage policies (SO 4.1) and resource-efficient economy policies" (SO 4.2).

The effectiveness evaluation examines the 184 projects that were approved after the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls for project proposals in 2015, 2016 and 2017[4]. However, this graded sequence of calls implies different project starts and thus also a variable scope of achieved outputs and results that projects from the three calls can report to the programme. This also means that not always all of the 184 projects can be covered by the following analysis.

2.2   The performance of projects in reaching their own output and result targets

This section looks at the performance of projects with respect to reaching their own final target values for outputs and results. Due to the specific nature of the relevant output and result indicators, performance has to be analysed for different samples of projects. In the following performance analysis, however, it should be noted that many projects had set very high (and often unrealistic) targets for some indicators in their application forms. These values, which were not questioned critically enough by the Joint Secretariat during the initial project appraisal, are now a formal part of the data in iDB and are used as a "reference basis" for determining the performance levels.

Outputs achieved by the 184 projects of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls

For output indicators that cover all 184 projects of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls, it was agreed that the analysis should be limited to the indicators "*number of policy learning events organised*" and "*number of good practices identified*".

The 184 projects have already achieved substantial programme-wide outputs (see: Annex III), which amount to 8,630 organised policy learning events and to 2,715 identified good practices.

The performance of projects in reaching their self-determined output target values for the two indicators can be summarised as follows:

- The current programme-wide performance of projects from all SOs is high for the indicator "*organised policy learning events*" (84% of the aggregated target is reached) and medium-high for the indicator "*identified good practices*" (around 58% of the aggregated target is reached).

- For the indicator "*organised policy learning events*", projects implementing SO1.1 and SO1.2 are performing best. They have reached their own targets at respectively 89% and 97%. Projects implementing the other four SOs have currently reached their targets either close to the programme-wide average (SO3.1: 83%) or are still below this average (SO2.1, SO4.1 and SO4.2: between 73% and 80%).

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[4] The first call closed on 30 July 2015 and led to the approval of 64 projects (in February 2016). The second call closed on 13 May 2016 and led to the approval of 66 projects (in October 2016). The third call for project proposals closed on 30 June 2017 and led to the approval of 54 projects (in March 2018).

- The situation is slightly different in case of the indicator "*identified good practices*". Project performance is above the programme-wide average for SO2.1 (66% of the targets reached), SO1.2 (62% of targets reached) and SO1.1 (61% of targets reached). For the other three SOs, however, the current performance is either close to the programme-wide average (SO4.2: 55% reached) or clearly below the average (SO3.1: 49% reached; SO 4.1: 52% reached).

With respect to the above-shown performance levels of projects, it should be borne in mind that outputs achieved at the end of phase 1 cannot be increased further by an implementation of phase 2 activities. This is because policy learning events and outcomes emerging from of the interregional exchange process (i.e. identified good practices) are only measured during phase 1.

Due to this, **there can be a risk that projects might not fully reach their final targets especially in case of the indicator "*identified good practices*".** These concerns are supported by a brief look at the SO-specific performance levels of only the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls that have already finalised their phase 1[5]. The risk of not reaching the target values is high in case of SO3.1 (56% of targets reached) and SO4.2 (65%) and medium for SO1.1 (73%) and SO1.2 (75%). For the other SOs, however, full achievement still seems possible (SO2.1: 81%; SO4.1: 82%).

Outputs achieved by the 130 projects with a finalised phase 1

Outputs for the indicators "*number of people with increased capacity*" and "*number of action plans developed*" have to be reported by projects only at the end of their phase 1. By end of June 2020, all projects from the 1st and 2nd calls (130 projects in total) had finalised their phase 1, either in 2018 (31 projects from the 1st call and 12 projects from the 2nd call) or in 2019 (i.e. 33 projects from the 1st call and 54 projects from the 2nd call). However, only a few 3rd call projects have completed phase 1 by June 2020[6] but did not yet report on the relevant indicators.

The analysis looks therefore only at the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls. However, the iDB-dataset did not yet include the achieved outputs of 20 projects from the 2nd call because the relevant progress reports are still checked and validated by the JS. In practice, the analysis thus covers only the outputs achieved by 110 projects with approved progress reports that include data for the relevant indicators.

Projects from the 1st and 2nd calls have reported **substantial programme-wide outputs** for the two indicators "*number of people with increased capacity*" and "*number of action plans developed*". **They amount to 10,383 people with an increased professional capacity and to 744 elaborated action plans.**

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[5] It should be noted that iDB does not yet include final data from 64 of the 130 projects: in case of 3 projects data originates from the 4th progress report and in case of 61 projects from the 5th progress report. A catching up potential is therefore existing.

[6] The 54 projects from the 3rd call will finalise their phase 1 either at the end of May 2020 (10 projects), at the end of November 2020 (18 projects) or at the end of May 2021 (26 projects). For the 10 projects that finalise their phase 1 in spring 2020, data for output indicators is not yet included into iDB. See: Interreg Europe Excel Sheet "Overview Projects Monitoring 1-4th Call-Update".

The performance of 1st and 2nd call projects in reaching their self-determined output target values is fairly variable for both indicators and also at the level of the six SOs:

- The current programme-wide performance of projects from all SOs is medium-high for the indicator "*people with increased capacity*" (66% of the aggregated target is reached) and high for the indicator "*developed action plans*" (84% of the aggregated target is reached).

- For the indicator "*increased professional capacity*" of persons having participated in organised policy learning events (i.e. interregional workshops, seminars and other cooperation activities; regular meetings of local/regional stakeholder groups), significant differences in performance can be observed at the SO level. Projects implementing SO3.1 and SO1.2 are performing best, as they have reached their own targets at respectively 79% and 70%. Projects implementing the other four SOs have currently reached their targets either close to the programme-wide average (SO2.1: 64%) or are still clearly below this average (SO1.1, SO4.1 and SO4.2: between 31% and 58%).

- For the indicator "*developed action plans*", project performance is above the programme-wide average for SO1.2 (around 92% of the targets reached) and for SO2.1 (around 87%). A performance close to the programme-wide average is observed for projects under SO3.1 and SO4.2 (82% each) as well as for projects under SO4.2 (80%). For SO1.1 projects, however, performance is still clearly below that average (60% of targets reached).

The above indicated **programme-wide and SO-level performance levels for both indicators will further increase** once the still missing information on achieved outputs of the 20 projects from the 2nd call is included into iDB.

After phase 1, however, the performance levels of these 130 projects will not improve further for both indicators. Especially in the case of the indicator *"persons with increased capacity"*, projects may not fully achieve their planned final target values. This situation can be explained by an unrealistic definition of project target values, which is quite often observed in case of projects from the 1st call. In fact, the JS had not checked the values of the latter projects as rigorously as this has been done later for projects from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th calls. Another factor indirectly contributing to this risk is that the output indicator does not capture a potential capacity increase emerging from the continuing policy learning process during phase 2[7].

Results achieved by the 184 projects of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls

The overview at the end of this report shows (**see: Annex IV**) that the 184 projects from the first three calls are planning to realise a total of 1.253 policy improvements, of which 1.007 are related to Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes or ETC programmes and 246 to other national, regional

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[7] Interreg Europe assumes that projects complete policy learning in phase 1 and continue this learning process only to a limited extent during phase 2 (i.e. learning from the local / regional or interregional monitoring of the action plan implementation).

or local support schemes. This original planning in mind, it is interesting to see how many of these policy improvements were achieved until the end of June 2020.

The 184 projects have already **improved 225 Structural Funds instruments and influenced a related amount of funding close to EUR 439 million.** They **also improved 134 other national, regional or local policy instruments and influenced an amount of funding of around EUR 93 million.**

The performance of the 184 projects in reaching their self-determined result target values is fairly variable across the four indicators and also at the level of the six SOs:

- For the indicator "*number of other instruments influenced*", the current programme-wide performance of projects from all SOs is already substantial (around 55% of the aggregated own target value is reached)[8]. Conversely, performance is still low for the indicator "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*" (22% is reached) and even very low for the two indicators measuring the amounts of funding influenced under each type of policy instrument (Structural Funds: 8% reached; other instruments: around 15% reached).

- For the indicator "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*", an above-average performance is observed for projects implementing SO1.2 (around 29% of own targets reached) as well as for projects implementing SO1.1 (around 24% reached), SO3.1 and SO4.2 (respectively 23% reached). Projects implementing the remaining two SOs show a below-average performance in terms of reaching their own targets (SO2.1: 19% reached; SO4.1: around 13% reached).

- For the indicator "*amount of Structural Funds influenced*", project performance is clearly above the programme-wide average in case of SO3.1 (20% of the targets reached) and SO4.2 (around 13% reached). Projects from the other four SOs are still below or even clearly below the programme-wide average (SO1.1, SO1.2, SO2.1 and SO4.1: levels ranging between 4% and 7%).

- For the indicator "*number of other instruments influenced*", projects implementing SO4.2 have already reached their targets in full (100%) and projects from SO1.2 and SO4.1 show an above-average performance (respectively 71% and 58% reached). In case of the other three SOs, however, project performance is either close to the programme-wide average (SO2.1: 52%) or still clearly below this average (SO1.1: 25%; SO3.1: 29%).

- The indicator "*amount of other funds influenced*" shows until now only low or even very low performance levels of projects across the six SOs. In case of SO3.1, the observed performance is clearly above the programme-wide average (around 29%). For the other five SOs, performance is either below the average (SO2.1: 9%; SO4.2: 10%) or clearly below the average (SO1.2: around 8%; SO4.1: 2%) or even not yet visible (SO 1.1: 0%).

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[8] However, the overall performance level needs to be seen with caution. This is due to the fact that many projects have actually improved other instruments because they did not succeed in influencing the originally targeted Structural Funds instruments. The indeed correct figures on what is actually achieved are thus often not exactly reflecting what the projects have initially planned.

For the funding-related indicators, low performance can mainly be explained by the fact that iDB includes extremely high target values that especially projects from the first call had originally indicated in their application forms.

Considering that only 19 projects from the 1st call have finalised their phase 2 in spring 2020[9] and that the remaining 165 projects from the first three calls are currently still implementing their action plans, **it is clear that the above-shown performance levels of projects for result achievement will significantly increase over the next two years.**

2.3 The contribution of projects to the output and result target values for 2023

This section looks at contributions that the currently achieved project outputs and results are making to Interreg Europe's pre-defined target values for 2023. When looking at the extent of the current contributions to output and result targets, it should always be borne in mind that the identified levels depend very much on the number of projects implemented under each of the six SOs[10] (as well as on the fact that less projects were approved under SO4 in the first two calls of the programme). Due to the specific nature of the four relevant output and result indicators, however, contribution levels have to be determined for different project samples.

Contribution of projects to the pre-defined output target values for 2023

The contribution analysis for outputs looks only at projects that have already finalised their phase 1 (i.e. 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls). For the time being, however, iDB only includes achieved outputs from 110 projects with an approved progress report (see above, section 2.2).

The examined projects with a finalised phase 1 contribute with their achieved outputs **already very substantially to the pre-defined target values for 2023 (see: Annex III).** For both relevant indicators, the current programme-wide and SO-specific contribution levels are as follows:

- The current contribution of projects to the programme-wide sum of 2023 target values (all SOs) is high for the two indicators *"people with increased capacity"* (around 87%) and *"developed action plans"* (around 82%).

- For the indicator *"people with increased capacity"*, project contributions already exceed under two SOs the respective SO-level target values for 2023 (SO1.2: 134%; SO3.1: 106%) and represent in case of SO2.1 around 80% of the final target value. Project contributions are at a medium-high level for SO4.1 (64%) and SO4.2 (around 59%), but still very low for SO1.1 (27%).

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[9] These 19 projects are implemented under SO1.1 (*SmartPilots*), under SO 1.2 (*NICHE; RATIO; HoCare; ERUDITE; ClusterS3; P2L2; S34GROWTH*), under SO 2.1 (*iEER; SME ORGANICS*), under SO 3.1 (*ZEROCO2; FINERPOL; PASSAGE; REGIO-MOB; CISMOB*), under SO 4.1 (*IMPACT; CHRISTA*) and under SO 4.2 (*RETRACE; CESME*).

[10] The 258 approved Interreg Europe projects are distributed across the six SOs as follows: SO1.1 (12 projects), SO 1.2 (53 projects), SO 2.1 (66 projects), SO3.1 (60 projects), SO4.1 (36 projects), SO4.2 (31 projects).

- In case of the indicator "*developed action plans*", the current contributions of achieved project outputs already exceed the SO1.2 target value for 2023 (150%) and are high in case of SO2.1 (around 87%). For the other four SOs, project contributions to the 2023 target values are either medium-high (SO3.1: 73%; SO4.1: 61%) or medium (SO4.2: 54%) or still low (SO1.1: 37%).

In case of both output indicators, target values for 2023 will for certain be fully reached or even over-reached under all SOs at the end of the Interreg Europe programme. This positive conclusion can be supported by two facts: first, because the achieved outputs of 20 projects from the 2nd call are still missing in the iDB-dataset, and second, because another 128 projects from the 3rd and 4th calls will also report additional outputs.

A full reaching of the 2023 final targets can even be possible for SO1.1, although it is implemented by only a few projects. This is because the cumulative own output targets of the 12 approved projects (i.e. 1,335 persons with improved capacity; 79 elaborated action plans) are above the pre-defined values for 2023 (1,000 persons with improved capacity; 76 elaborated action plans).

Contribution of projects to the pre-defined result target values for 2023

The contribution analysis for results covers all 184 projects from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls, as iDB does not yet include information on results from the very recently started 4th call projects (i.e. their 1st progress reports were only due in May 2020 and are currently checked by the Joint Secretariat).

The currently achieved results of the examined projects are already making significant contributions to achieving the final target values for 2023 (see: Annex IV). This can be shown for the two result indicators "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*" and "*amount of Structural Funds influenced*", for which the Interreg Europe programme has defined final target values at the outset.

In case of the **indicator "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*",** the projects from all SOs have achieved 225 policy improvements that represent already 46% of the aggregated programme-wide final target value of Interreg Europe (i.e. 489 Structural Funds instruments to be influenced). The current SO-specific contribution levels are as follows:

- An above-average and high contribution is observed for projects implementing SO1.2, since the 74 completed policy improvements under this SO represent around 80% of the SO-specific target value for 2023.

- A medium contribution is made by projects implementing SO1.1 and SO2.1, since their completed policy improvements correspond to respectively 47% and 46% of the SO-specific target values.

- For projects implementing the other three SOs, however, contributions to the final target values are for the moment still relatively low. The already completed policy improvements of SO3.1 (47 improvements), SO4.2 (14 improvements) and SO4.1 (20 improvements) are contributing to the relevant SO-specific target values with shares at respectively 38%, 23% and 33%.

The indicator "*amount of Structural Funds influenced*" shows that the 225 completed policy improvements from all SOs have influenced a total volume of funding close to EUR 430 million. This sum already represents 57% of the programme's aggregated target value for 2023. As regards the contributions to SO-specific final target values, however, strong variations are observed for the contribution levels of projects:

- The very high contribution level under SO3.1 is clearly an "outlier", since the funds influenced (i.e. around EUR 215 million) are representing already 112% of the SO-specific target value for 2023 (EUR 192 million). The most significant contribution to this total amount is made by policy improvements implemented under the project *LOCARBO*, which alone have influenced funding of EUR 174.7 million.

- A medium contribution is made by projects implementing SO1.2 and SO2.1, since their influenced funding corresponds to respectively 48% and 49% of the SO-specific target values.

- In case of the other three SOs, however, project contributions are significantly lower. Their influenced funding represents "only" between 23% and 28% of the SO-specific target values (i.e. SO1.1; SO4.1 and SO4.2).

In case of both result indicators, target values for 2023 will for certain be reached or even over-reached under all SOs at the end of the Interreg Europe programme. This positive outlook is supported by several facts.

The large majority of the 225 completed policy improvements are reported by the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls (220 improvements), but only a few improvements are reported by projects from the 3rd call. This makes clear that the above described contributions of achieved project results to the pre-defined target values for 2023 still reflect to a large extent the outcome of only half of all approved Interreg Europe projects.

This also shows that a very substantial part of the planned project results within Interreg Europe is still to come. All 54 projects from the third call will begin to implement their action plans in phase 2 either from June 2020 (10 projects), from December 2020 (18 projects) or even only from June 2021 (37 projects). The same applies to the 74 projects of the 4th call, which will, however, begin to implement their phase 2 even later (i.e. between August 2021 and May 2023).

3   The effectiveness of Interreg Europe's "Policy Learning Platform"

3.1   Aim and focus of the PLP effectiveness evaluation

The Policy Learning Platform (PLP) is the second pillar of Interreg Europe and provides access to the wealth of knowledge and expertise generated by the programme's interregional cooperation projects. The PLP comprises four thematic sections that are covering the thematic objectives (TO) of the Interreg Europe programme strategy[11]. The PLP is expected to facilitate continuous EU-wide policy learning and the capitalisation of good policy practices among the whole community of regional policy stakeholders across Europe, especially those involved in Investment for Growth and Jobs and European Territorial Cooperation programmes (i.e. overall programme objective for the PLP).

For supporting continuous policy learning in all regions of the EU, Norway and Switzerland, the PLP delivers a variety of services: they cover an organisation of different types of policy learning events, a provision of thematic publications, the continuing enlargement of on online accessible database with numerous good practices, as well as a direct interconnection with a community of peers and the provision of individualised policy advice on the four thematic priorities of Interreg Europe.

The aim of the PLP effectiveness evaluation is to appraise whether these PLP services are contributing to reaching the programme's overall objective for the PLP and also the three PLP-objectives that are further specifying its mission within Interreg Europe[12]. The evaluation looks at the PLP from a programme-wide perspective and also assesses service provision at the level of the four thematic PLP-sections (where possible).

The current performance of the PLP in delivering services is analysed on the ground of monitoring data gathered for a broad range of output and result indicators (**see: Annexes V and VI**). These are the pre-defined output and result indicators mentioned in the Interreg Europe programme document and the programme manual[13] as well as a larger number of other output and result indicators that were elaborated for internal monitoring purposes[14]. Data for these indicators originate from the latest available PLP evaluation report[15], which covers year 1 of the PLP implementation and also the two reporting semesters of year 2 (i.e. semester 1 from 25/1/2018 to 24/7/2018 and semester 2 from

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[11] "Research & innovation" (TO 1), "Competitiveness of SMEs" (TO 3), "Low-carbon economy" (TO 4) and "Environment & resource efficiency" (TO 6).

[12] The three PLP objectives on external and internal capitalisation are: (1) contributing to EU-wide capacity building and policy learning, by supporting networking and the exchange of experience and practices among relevant stakeholders; (2) exploiting results of interregional cooperation projects and making them available to a wider audience of regional policy stakeholders across Europe; (3) improving the quality of the programme's content, by advising the programme's monitoring committee on the thematic orientation or by advising projects on content-related issues that are distinct from the assistance offered by the joint secretariat to applicants. See: Interreg Europe Programme Manual, 13 December 2016, version 4, pp.32-33

[13] See: Interreg Europe Programme Manual, 13 December 2016, version 4, pp.57-60

[14] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy covering impact assessment, version of 19.07.2017.

[15] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019

25/7/2018 to 31/3/2019). Data is available for nearly all output indicators, but not yet for most of the result indicators (except: "*share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events*").

Furthermore, the analysis of results also looks at data and information from an online survey to PLP users[16], which was conducted between October and December 2019. This survey collected feedback on the quality of PLP services, both for better meeting the expectations of current users and for identifying possible future needs.

3.2 The current level of PLP output achievement

The PLP has already completed its third year of implementation, although the currently available monitoring data on outputs only refer to the second year of implementation (**see: Annex V**). The following analysis of this data will mostly highlight the evolution of the PLP online community, the current scope of and demand for PLP services as well as the online presence of the PLP and its external promotion.

Evolution of the PLP online community

Since the opening of PLP registration in September 2017, **the online community has considerably grown** from a total of 1,372 registered members at the end of year 1 (January 2018) to slightly more than 6,000 members at the end of year 2 (March 2019). The total number of registered PLP members now represents around 61% of the target value to be reached in 2023 (i.e. 10,000 members).

The registered PLP users are currently originating from 92% of the 290 existing European regions at NUTS 2 level (i.e. 279 different regions), with this level of coverage being already hugely higher than the target value originally expected to be reached in 2023 (ca. 17%).

At the end of March 2019, the PLP online community included 2,914 people from public authorities (48%) and 1,211 people from managing authorities of different ESIF programmes (20%) as well as 2,117 partners of currently operating Interreg Europe projects (35%) and 427 people from organisations involved in S3 (7%)[17].

The share of registered managing authorities / intermediate bodies responsible for ESIF programmes was at around 20% end of March 2019 and represented the double of the 2023 target value, but it was even higher at the end of the 1st semester of the second reporting year (i.e. 21.5% at the end of July 2018). Nevertheless, one of the objectives for year 3 of the PLP is to set up specific communication campaigns for reaching out to "newcomers", especially managing authorities and other bodies that are currently neither benefiting from the PLP services nor from Interreg Europe projects as such[18].

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[16] See: Interreg Europe PowerPoint Presentation "Users' needs survey - Results", 27 January 2020, Lille.

[17] Individual figures of the actor-specific breakdown of registered PLP members cannot be added up to achieve the above-indicated total of PLP members, as users can indicate to be part of several groups and thus are counted for several target groups.

[18] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, p. 9

Current scope of and demand for PLP services

An important PLP service is the **organisation of different types of policy learning events.** The number of organised policy learning events has considerable grown between year 1 (6 events) and year 2 (25 events). However, **the sum of all events organised until the end of year 2 (i.e. 31 events) represents only around 8% of the expected final target value for 2023 (i.e. 406 events).** Even if the annual frequency of event organisation has significantly increased, it must be expected that the final target value for 2023 will not be reached.

An interesting development is that the variety of forms of these policy learning events has considerably increased. Whereas only "thematic workshops" for project partners and "back-to-back policy learning events" (B2B events) have been organised by the PLP in the first year, there were also "webinars" and "policy matchmaking sessions" as well as "peer reviews" and an "annual event" in the second year. A brief overview of the various events that took place in year 2 is given below (**see: Table 1**). The table shows that these events covered most of the SOs in a rather balanced manner (i.e. SO1.1, SO1.2, SO2.1, SO3.1 and SO4.1, with 4 or 5 events for each). Only for SO4.2, fewer events were organised (2 events).

Table 1 – Policy learning events organised in year 2 (2018/2019) and number of participants (*)

TOs & SOs	Thematic workshops	Webinars	Policy matchmaking sessions (**)	Peer reviews	Annual event
TO 1, SO1.1	1 (32 participants)	1 (39 participants)	2 (12 participants)	0	N/A
TO 1, SO1.2	1 (26 participants)	1 (34 participants)	1 (7 participants)	1 (10 participants)	N/A
TO 3, SO2.1	1 (27 participants)	2 (72 participants)	1 (6 participants)	0	N/A
TO 4, SO3.1	2 (77 participants)	2 (40 participants)	0	1 (20 participants)	N/A
TO 6, SO4.1	2 (67 participants)	2 (92 participants)	1 (7 participants)	0	N/A
TO 6, SO4.1	0	1 (30 participants)	1 (6 participants)	0	N/A
Total	7 (229 participants)	9 (307 participants)	6 (38 participants)	2 (30 participants)	1 (158 participants)

(*) Figures also include members of the JS and PLP team. (**) The policy matchmaking sessions were first organised in the framework of the 2018 "European Week of Regions and Cities" (EWRC).

Source: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, pp. 3-6

Another closely related and positive development is that the number of participants in PLP offline and online events strongly increased in year 2 (+762 participants), but in particular during the 2nd semester when most of the events took place (580 participants). However, the total number of participants in all PLP events organised during the years 1 and 2 (1,232 persons) represents only 16% of the final target value for 2023 (i.e. 7,500 participants). This suggests that the final target will most likely not be reached.

The PLP provides 3 demand-driven services that either form part of the "Expert Support"[19] or are mentioned in other sections of the Interreg Europe website[20]. In general, these services aim to assist policy-relevant stakeholders not involved in Interreg Europe projects in making changes to their regional policies on topics addressed by the four TOs of the programme (i.e. research and innovation, SME competitiveness, low-carbon economy, and environment and resource efficiency)[21].

(1) Through the service **"Policy Learning Helpdesk"**, thematic experts of the PLP-team provide direct guidance and advice on how to improve the management and implementation of public policies addressing the four TOs. Stakeholders have to request this policy advice by sending a form with a detailed description to the relevant thematic PLP expert. The latter will then provide an answer to this request, based on his/her professional expertise and also by indicating other useful PLP-resources (e.g. policy briefs, good practices, webinars etc.). In the first year of the PLP, however, only 10 people had received policy advice. In the second year of implementation, requests already more than doubled (27 persons receiving support and advice). However, there is still a huge gap between cumulative outputs achieved at the end of year 2 (37 persons) and the final target value for 2023 (1,120 persons assisted).

As the provision of this service is primarily driven by the actual demand of users, specific actions on targeted communication to the PLP target groups are planned to raise the number of direct request for assistance. Moreover, it may be considered to revise this indicator by also including other demand-driven PLP services such as "peer reviews" and "matchmaking events" (see below). This will allow a more comprehensive overview of all personalised services offered by the PLP expert team and the policymakers benefiting from this targeted support.

(2) "Peer Reviews" are short onsite visits of external experts that are expected to induce an interregional learning process as well as an improvement of the implementation of ESIF programmes or local / regional development policies. Peer reviews are organised by the PLP on grounds of an approved request that was previously submitted to a call for peer reviews (i.e. the call is now open permanently).

During the reporting year 2, two peer reviews took place in Lille / France (October 2018) and in Gävleborg / Sweden (January 2019). The peer review in Lille was a "pilot" that allowed the JS to refine the method to be adopted for the next peer reviews. Another 8 peer reviews followed during year 3: one review in Eupen / Belgium (May 2019) and two reviews in the Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur / France (June 2019 and December 2019) as well as one review each in Sofia /Bulgaria (June 2019), in Berlin / Germany (July 2019), in Catalonia / Spain (October 2019), at the "Austria Wirtschaftsservice" in Vienna (January 2020) and in the County of Karlovac / Croatia (February 2020).

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[19] For the services "Policy Learning Helpdesk" and "Peer Reviews", see: https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/expert-support/#c7697

[20] For the service "Policy Matchmaking Sessions", see: https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/event/2568/policy-matchmaking-at-europe-let-s-cooperate/?no_cache=1&cHash=a2a087df6d9be21a31aa4fcb3356ce15

[21] The main intention is indeed to primarily focus on policy makers not involved in Interreg Europe projects. However, this is no obligation as also some project partners have benefited from demand-driven services.

(3) Another recently introduced service for stimulating peer learning is **"Policy Matchmaking Sessions"**. Matchmaking sessions are thematic discussions moderated by a PLP expert, which focus on the specific needs and challenges expressed by a regional or local policymaker. This service is not yet explicitly mentioned in the expert support section of the Interreg Europe website. In the past, matchmaking sessions were attached to "physical" events such as the 2018 European Week of Regions and Cities (6 sessions held) or the Europe let's cooperate! event of April 2019 (4 sessions held[22]). Also "virtual" matchmaking sessions are currently thought of. For participating or hosting a matchmaking session, stakeholders should express their interest by contacting the PLP-experts directly in order to explore possibilities for playing a part in a forthcoming session. Until now, however, no virtual session has taken place yet.

The online presence of the PLP

Overall, the PLP performs very well online and also benefits from the established online presence of the Interreg Europe programme. The online survey of 2019 to PLP users shows that 57% of the respondents find it easy to surf and find information, although no clear distinction is made between the PLP webpages and the Interreg Europe website as a whole[23].

The interest in the online content of the PLP hugely increased in year 2 if compared to year 1. This can be demonstrated by looking at the evolution of monthly average number of page views to PLP website pages. The first year's monthly value was still at only 1,800 views, but reached in year 2 already 14,889 monthly views in the first reporting semester (January 2018 to July 2018) and even 16,457 monthly views in the second semester (August 2018 to March 2019). The average monthly page views of both reporting semesters are therefore considerably higher than the target value expected for 2023 (i.e. 500 average monthly views).

There is also a very strong interest in the PLP online database of good practices. During the first four months since the online start of the PLP, there were already 2,062 page views in the good practices database (status: 5 January 2018)[24]. In the second year, however, the number of page views increased to 8.419 in the first reporting semester (January 2018 to July 2018) and reached even 9,362 views in the second semester (August 2018 to March 2019)[25]. The latter value represents already around 94% of the target value expected for 2023 (i.e. 10,000 page views). Moreover, also around 47% of the good practices were "followed" by registered users during the second semester although that share was still at 62% during the first semester. Nevertheless, also these values clearly over-reached the target expected for 2023 (10%).

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[22] See on this: https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/news/5460/matchmaking-sessions-at-europe-let-s-cooperate/?no_cache=1&cHash=45b99029cdc38c83900a3e1378308610

[23] See: Interreg Europe PowerPoint Presentation "Users' needs survey - Results" (27 January 2020, Lille), slide 15.

[24] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, January 2018

[25] It should be noted that Interreg Europe projects are obliged to submit their good practices to the good practice database. This, however, artificially increases the views of this part of the website.

External promotion of the PLP

The efforts made for externally promoting the PLP as an EU-wide one-stop-shop reference portal for stakeholders involved in regional development policies and ESIF programmes are in overall terms rather stable but still too low.

The total number of presentations of the PLP at external events not linked to Interreg Europe **was low** at the end of March 2019 (26 presentations) and only little progress has been made between year 1 and year 2 (+14 presentations). Current outputs represent 9% of the expected target value for 2023 (280 presentations), which allows to conclude that this target value will most likely not be reached at the end of the programme.

The low number of external presentations is explained by the need to concentrate efforts of the PLP team on core capitalisation actions judged as priority for the PLP. In the next years, all thematic experts and the PLP management team will be mobilised to ensure a larger presence of the PLP in other events. This also follows one of the objectives for year 3, which is to renew and reinforce the links with other EU platforms and programmes[26].

Despite of the still low number of external presentations, however, **all presentations have already reached a significant audience** (3,917 persons). This represents 28% of the target value to be attained in 2023 (14,000 persons). Considering the implementation time still ahead, it can be expected that larger parts of the final target value will most likely be reached.

3.3   The current level of PLP result achievement

Quantitative information on results achieved by the PLP exists only for the indicator "*share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP*" (**see: Annex VI**). Data show that 93.3% of the persons having participated in at least one of the 7 thematic workshops of year 2 (see above) as well as in 6 webinars organised during the 2nd semester were of the opinion that these events met their expectations. This aggregated satisfaction rate emerged from an analysis of all post-event surveys that were conducted among participants after each event[27].

Several charts in the annex part (**see: Annex VII**) provide **more differentiated insights** into the "usefulness" and „relevance" of thematic workshops as well as into the "informativeness" and "interactivity" of webinars[28]. In case of **thematic workshops,** the feedback is despite of a moderate response rate[29] encouraging. As for usefulness, 31% of the respondents answered "excellent" and 53%

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[26] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, p. 10

[27] The following question of post-event surveys has been regarded: „*Did the event meet your expectations*?", with the reply options "Yes" or "No". See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, p. 11

[28] See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, pp. 12-18

[29] The overall response rate to "post-event surveys" for thematic workshops was moderate (i.e. 28%). Therefore, other methods of collecting feedback from the workshop participants are being considered by the PLP team, which would allow increasing the survey response rate and, thus, to assure more accurate survey results.

answered "good". As for the relevance, 36% of the respondents answered "excellent" and 52% answered "good". A largely positive feedback is also noticed for **webinars.** 23% of the respondents gave the highest score "5" for both the informativeness and interactivity, with the score "4" being given by 48% of the respondents for informativeness and by 35% of respondents for interactivity.

Key findings emerging from the 2019 online survey to PLP users

Some more recent information on the role of PLP and the quality of its services can also be drawn from an online survey conducted in 2019 among PLP users (**see: Box 1**), although the overall response rate was rather low[30].

Box 1 – PLP user feedback on the role of the PLP and the quality of PLP services

40% of the respondents consider the PLP a reference portal in the EU for regional development, of which 15% stated "very much" and 25% stated "to a large extent".

85% of the respondents having already attended a PLP-event (e.g. thematic workshops, webinars, matchmaking sessions at EWRC, others) were satisfied, although 37% of the respondents have never participated in a PLP-event.

77% of the respondents having already consulted the PLP-website are satisfied with the quality of the available online information.

81% of the respondents having already read material from PLP's "knowledge hub" (e.g. online publications such as policy briefs, articles, reports on past events etc.) are satisfied, although 37% of the respondents have never read a PLP publication.

80% of the respondents actually using the PLP's good practice database are satisfied with the quality of this online service.

When it comes to the **PLP's effects on policy learning and on the change of regional development policies**, some trends can be highlighted. With respect to policy learning, the PLP's main effect is clearly on increasing the professional capacity and skills of individual users (individual learning), while effects on organisational learning seem to be less evident. However, only 28% of the respondents think that the PLP does contribute to policy change, whereas 25 % stated "no" and the remainder did not know. In cases where the PLP was seen to have effects, the latter emerged from a contribution to the definition of the action plans within Interreg Europe projects or from a change in the strategic focus of a policy or from a change in the focus and allocation of funds. Yet, this survey information still remains too vague to confirm a clear causality link. Therefore, further research into these aspects is required.

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[30] The survey was sent to 7,708 recipients (through emails) and shared on social media or newsletters. The overall response rate was 9% (691 replies). See: Interreg Europe PowerPoint Presentation "Users' needs survey - Results", 27 January 2020, Lille.

4 The impact of Interreg Europe on policy change

4.1 Aim and focus of the comprehensive evaluation of the policy impact

The aim of this part of the 2020 update evaluation is to show how direct effects on the change of policies for territorial development emerge (i.e. expected result of Interreg Europe) and which part of that change can be credibly attributed to outputs achieved by the programme interventions (i.e. magnitude of the impact). For understanding this complex relationship well, the evaluation must be comprehensive and thus analyse stepwise the different sequences of the causal chain that is shown in the Theory of Change elaborated for the 2018 mid-term evaluation. The analysis therefore looks at

- activities and processes establishing the necessary preconditions that allow projects to actually achieve the envisaged policy changes (i.e. project activities of phase 1 dedicated to an exchange of experience and policy learning process; project activities of phase 2 dedicated to a monitoring of the action plan implementation),

- all policy improvements of Interreg Europe projects (i.e. planned, currently implemented or already achieved during phases 1 and 2), in order to identify policy changes that either emanate entirely from the supported projects (i.e. "impact outcome") or are implemented with the help of other project-external actors but still include direct though variable project effects (i.e. "influence outcomes"),

- socio-economic or environmental effects in the territory of project partners, which are induced by a practical use of improved policy instruments and contribute to EU-wide and country-level development goals (i.e. headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, objectives of national or regional Smart Specialisation Strategies, territorial cohesion in general).

Although this evaluation mainly looks at the policy impact of Interreg Europe projects, it also explores possible direct effects that the PLP peer reviews may have on policy change. Evaluation findings are presented in a programme-wide perspective and also for each specific objective, where possible.

The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative information from different Interreg Europe sources (e.g. iDB monitoring system, progress reports of projects, approved action plans, PLP reports and other programme-internal analyses etc.). For the different parts of this analysis, a total of 77 mini-case studies were elaborated that cover both pillars of Interreg Europe[31]: 71 mini-case studies analysed projects or policy improvements of individual project partners under the six SOs (**see: Annex VIII**) and 6 mini-case studies examined the PLP peer reviews carried out in 2018 / 2019. Finally, the evaluation of the impact on policy change also uses information from a recently conducted online survey among project partners that updates a similar survey conducted for the 2018 mid-term evaluation (**see: Annexes IX and X**).

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[31] The detailed mini case studies were presented in the annex part of the Interim Report of the 2020 update evaluation.

4.2 Establishing the necessary preconditions for successful policy change

This first step of the comprehensive evaluation examines how projects establish the necessary preconditions that enable them to actually achieve the envisaged policy change in the course of their life cycle (i.e. phases 1 and 2).

A crucial precondition for improving and better delivering national, regional or local policies dedicated to territorial development is the capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations and of other stakeholder organisations[32]. The essential part of this capacity increase is expected to emerge from a direct involvement of project partner and stakeholder organisations in phase 1 activities: they are dedicated to initiating an interregional and local / regional policy learning process and to exploiting the lessons learnt for a development of action plans promoting policy change. Project activities supported in phase 2 are then primarily dedicated to monitoring the implementation of each action plan, but not to the actual implementation of measures from these action plans[33].

Nevertheless, also phase 2 can involve structured learning processes that may emerge from an optional implementation of pilot actions[34] and in particular from local / regional and interregional activities for monitoring the action plan implementation. Until now, however, there is still little knowledge about the latter aspect since only 19 projects have recently completed phase 2 and thus finished their overall project implementation.

Phase 1 activities dedicated to interregional and local/regional policy learning

For the exchange of experience and policy learning process in phase 1, the Interreg Europe programme manual sets out an indicative cooperation philosophy[35] that also includes a number of optional and compulsory activities for organising and structuring the working process among project partners[36].

The interregional cooperation activities of phase 1 are adequate and also held in high esteem by respondents to the updated online survey of 2020. They allow projects to set up and carry out structured and fruitful interregional policy learning, wherefore survey respondents generally wish that current cooperation activities are also continued in the period 2021-2027.

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[32] Aside to this capacity increase, there are of course also other important preconditions that have to be met by projects. Examples are an adequate composition of the project partnership, the existence of mutual trust and shared understanding of the issue(s) addressed, a high commitment of all partners to the project's goals or well-organised working and management processes at the project level etc.

[33] Interreg Europe supports the costs incurred for monitoring activities only, as the costs related to an implementation of action plan measures should be funded from local, regional or national sources. The only exception is pilot actions that Interreg Europe may support in justified cases.

[34] Pilot actions are linked to an implementation of action plans and aim at testing a new approach at the beginning of phase 2. This usually refers to the transfer of existing practices between regions. But it can also relate to a new initiative jointly designed by the regions during phase 1 and jointly implemented in phase 2.

[35] Interreg Europe Programme Manual, 27 March 2019 (version 7), pp. 40-46

[36] Typical but optional interregional activities that may allow carrying out the exchange of experience and policy learning process are site visits or study visits, thematic seminars or workshops, peer-reviews, staff exchanges or joint thematic surveys / studies / analysis. Compulsory activities are the establishment of local / regional stakeholder groups and the organisation of regular stakeholder group meetings, but also a participation in activities of the Policy Learning Platform.

Despite the respondents' different project backgrounds and experiences, a clear majority of the comments made to the survey (**see: Annex X**) is positively valuing the functions and benefits of interregional workshops or meetings, of joint study visits or staff exchanges as well as of peer reviews and other cooperation tools. Although many respondents suggest specific improvements or extensions to each of these activities, it should be noted that projects can already carry out most of these aspects with the current and non-compulsory cooperation activities supported by Interreg Europe. However, an interesting suggestion worth considering in the future is that study visits or staff exchanges should also become possible in a future phase 2 of projects. Both activities could not only be used for supporting the implementation of future action plans, but also for continuing and intensifying mutual learning processes after the end of the projects' exchange of experience phase (see also below).

Depending on the specific policy fields and challenges addressed, projects can freely combine these cooperation activities for establishing a tailor-made **interregional learning process that focuses on an exchange and analysis of policy-relevant experiences as well as on an identification and dissemination of good practices.**

With regard to the interregional sharing of good practices and the learning from good practices, however, the opinions of survey respondents are more divided. Many respondents consider this focus important and also wish that it is continued in the period 2021-2027, with some of them even asking for a higher intensity or a stricter interregional frame (e.g. with respect a documentation of good practice contents and of transfer potentials). Other respondents suggest that the quality of this process should be improved, but at the same time acknowledge that the projects themselves must become more responsible in this respect.

As part of the policy learning process during phase 1, **projects must also establish a regional or local stakeholder group for each policy instrument addressed.** These stakeholder groups shall ensure that interregional learning takes also place at an organisational and inter-organisational level (i.e. between project partner and stakeholder organisations), since policy-making processes are usually complex and involve a variety of players.

The large majority of survey respondents (i.e. 77%) consider a continuous interaction with other regional / local stakeholder organisations as particularly crucial for developing policy improvement approaches that can be implemented through the subsequently adopted action plans. However, survey respondents also highlight that the benefits resulting from an interaction with other local or regional stakeholder organisations are influenced by different factors. The most relevant ones are the type of policy instruments addressed (i.e. Structural Funds instruments; other national, regional or local instruments), the willingness of local and regional players to get involved in the project (i.e. they need to see an added value), the scope of stakeholders involved in the groups (i.e. high numbers sometimes challenge the effectiveness of meetings) and the actual capacities of local or regional stakeholder organisations (i.e. their human resources and knowledge potentials which they can bring into the project-level work process).

Nevertheless, most survey respondents who commented the role of local or regional stakeholder groups wish that interaction with these important players is continued or even scaled up in the period 2021-2027. With respect to the latter aspect, suggestions include a further increase of the number of stakeholder group meetings, the possibility to "buy-in" external experts for raising the attractiveness of stakeholder meetings or the continuation of stakeholder group meetings also during phase 2.

The updated online survey also explored **in how far the three levels of this policy learning process[37] are important for achieving an improvement of the addressed policy instruments.** All three levels of policy learning are considered very important by a large majority of the respondents (60% or more), although slight variations do exist between the levels. Clearly most important is "learning within the project partner organisations" (around 69%), then followed by the "learning of individual staff members" from project partner organisations who are directly involved in project activities (around 63%) and finally by "inter-organisational learning within the established stakeholder groups" (around 61%). This somewhat weaker position of the third level might be explained by the fact that though stakeholder interaction is indeed considered highly relevant (see above), the associated gain of knowledge for policy improvement is not always comparable to knowledge gains associated with the other two levels.

Elaboration of action plans at the end of phase 1 and focus of the sought policy change

One of the mandatory phase 1 activities is that each project partner has to elaborate an action plan at the end of phase 1. Each plan provides details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument addressed. Also actions that may have already been started in phase 1 should be included in these plans. If the same policy instrument is addressed by several project partners, however, only one action plan is required.

Two thirds of the survey respondents consider this mandatory capitalisation on the phase 1 learning outcomes and also their transformation into concrete action plan measures as fully relevant. Most of the other respondents consider action planning as partially relevant, but only a few as non-relevant. Partial relevance or non-relevance were explained by the fact that the relation between the exchange of experience lessons and the action plan is not always evident or that an implementation of measures is not guaranteed and depends on political support. Further explanations were that only "soft" actions can be developed and that it is often difficult to address already implemented policy instruments (esp. Structural Funds programmes).

Moreover, the survey results also shed light on **how project partners intend to achieve policy change through implementing their action plans.** For this, Interreg Europe suggests three

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[37] (1) Individual learning, through a direct involvement of staff members from partner organisations in all project activities. (2) Organisational learning, through sharing and further developing new policy-relevant knowledge within project partner organisations. (3) Inter-organisational learning within the concerned policy sub-systems (or stakeholder learning), through continuous interaction and exchange with other policy-relevant local / regional organisations or actors in the established stakeholder groups.

general types of policy improvement that may also be interconnected: an implementation of new projects within the addressed policy instrument (type 1), a change in the management of the policy instrument (type 2) and a change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (type 3).

A clear majority of the responding project lead partners and project partners implement only one of the three types of policy improvement within their action plan (61%). The most frequently selected type is the implementation of new projects (50%), followed by a change in the management of policy instruments (34%) and a change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (16%). Around one third of the respondents combine two of the three types of policy improvement within their action plans. The most frequent combinations are "new projects" and "change in the management" (type 1 & type 2) as well as "new projects" and "change of strategic focus" (type 1 & type 3), whereas a purely governance-oriented combination (type 2 & type 3) is less frequently adopted. Although only very few respondents have opted for including all three types of policy improvements within their action plans, these cases mean that a rather demanding policy improvement approach is implemented.

These variations in the frequency of use, also visible across the six SOs, reflect the fact that action plans are always tailored to the particular needs of each project partner. Those needs are strongly determined by the respective policy theme and especially by the institutional-organisational settings governing the addressed policy instrument.

Optional implementation of pilot actions at the beginning of phase 2

The main outcomes of the exchange of experience and policy learning process (esp. increased capacity of individuals and of partner institutions or organisations) as well as the mandatory elaboration of action plans are expected to establish the essential preconditions that enable project partners to actually improve the addressed policy instruments.

However, there may be cases where good practices from another region will first need to be tested in the "importing" region before it can be used there for improving a policy instrument. Should an importing region for different reasons not have the financial means for such testing, then a project may submit before the end of phase 1 a funding application to Interreg Europe for carrying out a pilot action. Once an application is approved, the pilot action is then integrated into the action plan(s) of the concerned project partner(s) and implemented at the beginning of phase 2.

Since the 2018 mid-term evaluation, it can be observed that the number of approved pilot actions significantly increased from 11 to 69 pilot actions by the end of April 2020. Details on these 69 pilot actions (**see: Annex XI**) show that they are implemented under 44 Interreg Europe projects. Around 56% of these pilot actions are implemented by projects from the 1st call (39 pilot actions) and the others by projects from the 2nd call (30 pilot actions).

The total support allocated to these 69 pilot actions currently amounts to EUR 3.578.611 and the breakdown by SO is as follows[38]:

- SO1.1 "Innovation infrastructure": 1 pilot action with a total budget of EUR 127.700;

- SO1.2 "Innovation delivery": 18 pilot actions with a total budget of EUR 857.886;

- SO2.1 "SME competitiveness": 8 pilot actions with a total budget of EUR 522.123;

- SO3.1 "Low carbon economy": 24 pilot actions with a total budget of EUR 1.102.510;

- SO4.1 "Natural & cultural heritage": 11 pilot actions with a total budget of EUR 591.703;

- SO4.2 "Resource efficiency": 7 pilot actions with a total budget of EUR 376.689.

The 44 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls implement in general one or two pilot actions. However, there are also a few projects where three or even more pilot actions are implemented by the respectively involved lead partners and/or project partners (e.g. *MONITORIS3*; *NICHE*; *OSIRIS*; *LOCARBO*; *CHRISTA*).

Most of the approved pilot actions (58 actions) are usually implemented by one or more project partners from the same region. This can also generate further policy learning processes at a local or regional level, which are associated with the practice-based testing of the feasibility of action plan measures (i.e. "learning-by-doing"). However, robust evidence of this does not exist since Interreg Europe has not yet undertaken an in-depth study on the current implementation practice of pilot actions.

The remaining 11 pilot actions are implemented in cooperation with project partners from other countries. This is the case for pilot actions under the projects *BRIDGES* (SO1.1), *NMP-REG* (SO1.2), *MONITORIS3* (SO1.2), *iEER* (SO2.1), *PURE COSMOS* (SO2.1), *Green Screen* (SO3.1), *EMPOWER* (SO3.1), *REBUS* (SO3.1), *RESOLVE* (SO3.1) and *SOCIAL GREEN* (SO3.1), but somehow also for a pilot action of *CISMOB* (SO3.1) that involves another partner in an advisory role. This cooperative implementation also points to additional joint policy learning processes (bilateral or multilateral), which involve not only a "learning-by-doing" component but also a joint reflection between different partners on the lessons learnt.

The above analysis shows that in 34% of the 130 first and second call projects, partners are using pilot actions for testing the practicability of measure from their action plans at the start of phase 2. Looking at this programme activity from the perspective of the respondents to the online survey, their assessment gives a mixed picture at first glance. While an implementation of pilot actions is considered by a little more than half of the respondents as fully relevant (52%), the others have judged an implementation either as partially relevant (36%) or even as not relevant (12%). This judgement of relevance should, however, be considered with caution, since the latter group can include

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[38] Interreg Europe Excel Sheet "Overview of Pilot Action Requests April 2020".

project partner organisations that did not need to test the practicability of their action plan measures at the outset of phase 2.

Monitoring the implementation of action plans during phase 2

Since phase 1 is considered to cover the "core business" of Interreg Europe projects, the programme supports only three types of activities in phase 2 that are pre-defined in the programme manual[39]: activities (1) for monitoring the implementation of action plans[40], (2) for communication and dissemination[41] as well as (3) for management and coordination[42]. To help projects with ensuring a proper monitoring of their action plan implementation during phase 2, the joint secretariat has also issued a guidance note in April 2019 that insists on the importance of reporting back achieved policy changes to Interreg Europe[43].

Our mini-case studies analysed how the 19 already finalised projects[44] actually carried out a local / regional and interregional monitoring of the action plan implementation. Case studies also explored in what ways this might have led to structured learning processes during phase 2 that then contribute to further increasing the policy making capacity of project partners.

A cross-analysis of the 19 cases shows that projects and even partners of the same project have applied very different approaches and activities for monitoring an implementation of their action plans. This is mainly due to the specificity of local / regional policy contexts, but also a consequence of the variable relations that exist between project partners and the addressed policy instruments[45].

Project partners carried out **different local or regional monitoring activities (individually or in combination),** which were sometimes also financed from their own resources (i.e. no Interreg Europe support):

- A number of project partners monitored their action plan implementation on ground of a project-wide common approach. For keeping track of the implementation process, partners used specific

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[39] Interreg Europe Programme Manual, 27 March 2019 (version 7), pp. 48, 49

[40] This type of activity includes two aspects: (i) monitoring the progress made by maintaining contact with the stakeholders involved in implementing the activities in each region and (ii) organising one project meeting at the end of each year to exchange on the way the implementation is progressing.

[41] This type of activity includes two aspects: (i) regularly updating the project website, providing information on the progress made on the implementation of the different action plans and (ii) organising a final public dissemination event gathering executives and policymakers from the regions and from other relevant institutions.

[42] This type of activity includes three aspects: (i) preparing, submitting and following up progress reports, (ii) monitoring and controlling the incurred expenditure and (iii) project closure activities.

[43] For the progress report of projects, several instructions in the "activity" and "results" sections were adapted to reflect the focus on action plan implementation. The guidance note provides an overview of these instructions and further explains / clarifies the programme expectations for phase 2 reporting. See: Interreg Europe, document "How to ensure a successful Phase 2? Guidance note, Version 1 (12 April 2019)", pp 5-6

[44] *SmartPilots* (SO1.1), *NICHE* (SO1.2), *RATIO* (SO1.2), *HoCare* (SO1.2), *ERUDITE* (SO1.2), *ClusterS3* (SO1.2), *P2L2* (SO1.2), *S34GROWTH* (SO1.2), *iEER* (SO2.1), *SME ORGANICS* (SO2.1), *ZEROCO2* (SO3.1), *FINERPOL* (SO3.1), *PASSAGE* (SO3.1), *REGIO-MOB* (SO3.1), *CISMOB* (SO3.1), *IMPACT* (SO4.1), *CHRISTA* (SO4.1), *RETRACE* (SO4.2), *CESME* (SO4.2)

[45] A project partner can be an institution / organisation that is directly and entirely responsible for the addressed policy instrument (e.g. a managing authority of an ESIF programme or an administration in charge of another local / regional / national policy instrument). But a project partner can also not have any direct responsibility for a policy instrument and has in this case to interact with the responsible but project-external institution / organisation, e.g. by convincing those actors of the benefits associated with the proposed improvement.

indicators and milestones (e.g. *ClusterS3; IMPACT; SME Organics; RETRACE*) or a jointly defined and agreed "mapping methodology" (e.g. *P2L2*) or a standardised template for reporting content and progress (e.g. *REGIO MOB; IMPACT; CHRISTA*).

- The partners of many projects organised informal or formal meetings with other policy-relevant local / regional stakeholder organisations for discussing the ongoing policy improvement process, sometimes also by continuing an already established local stakeholder group (e.g. *NICHE; HoCare; ERUDITE; ClusterS3; P2L2; S34Growth; SME Organics; ZEROCO2; FINERPOL; REGIO MOB; IMPACT; CHRISTA; RETRACE; CESME*). In addition, some project partners mobilised or informed other policy-relevant local / regional stakeholder organisations through regular emails and phone calls, newsletters or published articles and also by an updating of project-related social media contents (e.g. *SME Organics; ZEROCO2; CESME*).

- Many project partners organised one-to-one meetings or technical meetings with Structural Funds managing authorities or other stakeholder organisations that are responsible for implementing measures of the action plan, especially if project partners were not directly in charge of the addressed policy instrument (e.g. *NICHE; RATIO; HoCare; SME Organics; ZEROCO2; FINERPOL; CISMOB; REGIO MOB; IMPACT; RETRACE*).

- Some project partners established contacts with key political decision makers at the local / regional levels, either through regular meetings (e.g. *RATIO*) or on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. *ZEROCO2*).

- A number of partners organised additional events on the topic addressed by their project (e.g. workshops and seminars, an "open public process" or site visits at places where action plan measures are implemented). This was sometimes done for mobilising policy-relevant stakeholders and fostering their commitment to implement action plan measures (e.g. *RATIO*; *HoCare*; *IMPACT*), but sometimes also for involving or reaching out to new stakeholder organisations that are relevant for the implementation process (e.g. *NICHE*; *ZEROCO2*; *RETRACE*).

- For speeding up, further deepening or timewise expanding an implementation of policy improvements, many project partners launched additional activities of different kinds. Concrete examples are an intensification of networking between local / regional stakeholder organisations (e.g. *NICHE*), the organisation of project development meetings and the initiation of small follow-up projects (e.g. *ERUDITE*), the organisation of educational or training sessions (e.g. *CESME; RETRACE*), the organisation of structured discussions on an introduction of new funding schemes and the preparation of the upcoming programming period 2021-2027 (e.g. *SMART PILOTS; RETRACE*) or the organisation of meetings for a cross-border coordination of action plans (e.g. *PASSAGE*).

Partners of the examined projects have also initiated **different interregional activities for jointly monitoring an implementation of their action plans:**

- Several projects used a common approach for monitoring the implementation of their partners' action plans (see above) and for drawing more general lessons from the observed implementation

processes. This was done either through a standardised reporting template elaborated by the project lead partner that often also used indicators (e.g. *SME Organics; CHRISTA*; *IMPACT*) or on ground of a "mapping methodology" that was jointly developed and agreed by the project partners at an interregional phase 2 kick-off meeting (e.g. *P2L2*).

- Many projects organised one or more interregional meetings / workshops for exchanging their experiences on factors that shaped the action plan implementation processes (e.g. relevance of context conditions; challenges and positive driving forces etc.) and for jointly discussing the implementation progress (e.g. *RATIO; HoCare; ERUDITE; ClusterS3; iEER; ZEROCO2; PASSAGE; REGIO MOB; CISMOB; RETRACE*). The *CHRISTA* project carried out specific interregional cross-fertilisation activities in phase 2, when partners or stakeholder organisations from different project regions were invited to local activities or meetings that another partner organised for the implementation of a policy improvement.

- Some project partnerships used the project website for "virtually" sharing information about the progress made in implementing the partners' action plans (e.g. *SMART PILOTS*; iEER). Other projects held monthly Skype calls for getting regular information about the implementation progress (e.g. *iEER*) or organised video calls between a project partner and stakeholder organisations in a specific region to which also the project lead partner was connected (e.g. *ERUDITE*).

The variety and focus of these activities illustrates **two important aspects that should be considered in the future.** While in many projects the essential foundations for an implementation of policy improvement could indeed be laid in phase 1, there had also been relatively often a need for further action during phase 2 to ensure that still missing but necessary preconditions for successful policy change were actually established. Moreover, these activities show that a policy learning process indeed took place in phase 2, which, however, is not captured by the existing programme indicators.

Concluding remarks on the learning-based capacity increase of individuals and organisations

Based on the above analysis and the results of the online survey, we can now define the term "capacity increase" in more detail and also show its importance for Interreg Europe projects.

In the context of Interreg Europe projects, **the term "capacity increase" covers three main dimensions:** (1) an improved professional capacity of individual staff members from a project partner institution / organisation, (2) an improved capacity of the entire project partner institution / organisation and (3) an improved joint capacity of a project partner institution / organisation and other project-external but policy relevant stakeholder organisations. The latter dimension relates to the establishment of loose "advocacy coalitions" or of more formal "policy networks" between different key actors in a given policy field, which both can be used for pushing innovation and change in the concerned policy.

All three dimensions are of high importance for Interreg Europe projects, albeit to a slightly different extent. This difference in importance depends on how project partners intend to improve a particular policy instrument (i.e. by implementing improvements of types 1, 2 and 3 or combinations thereof) and also on the thematic issue addressed by each policy instrument. Nevertheless, **a capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations has the highest level of importance among all three dimensions**, irrespective of whether only one type of policy improvement or a combination of various policy improvement types is implemented in an action plan.

At the same time, however, the preceding analysis also shows that this increase of capacities is gradual, both in terms of time and content. In phase 1, the capacity increase emerges mainly from a better understanding of existing strengths / weaknesses and of policy processes or instruments as well as from an identification of good practice approaches with which improvements of the current situation can possibly be achieved in the future **(i.e. capacity increase based on "mutual exchange").** In phase 2, however, the capacity increase mainly results from the experiences gained with practically implementing the action plan measures and from conclusions that can be drawn on the actual relevance and suitability of the measures originally envisaged **(i.e. capacity increase based on "learning-by-doing").**

The exchange- and practice-based capacity increases are thus closely interlinked parts of a comprehensive enabling process, whose respective intrinsic value should neither be separated by operational specifications nor upgraded or downgraded in terms of their relevance.

4.3   The expected and already achieved "impact outcome" of projects

Interreg Europe projects are currently working on or have achieved policy improvements that come about as "impact outcomes". These outcomes can already emerge in the course of phase 1, but may occur more frequently during or at the end of phase 2.

Policy improvements being "impact outcomes" create a measurable and direct contribution to the expected result of Interreg Europe that is entirely attributable to the supported project. First, because these improvements are directly inspired by good practices or new ideas / concepts from other project partners that were discovered thanks to the interregional exchange of experience and policy learning process. Second and even more important because these improvements are always implemented by project partner organisations bearing the full and direct responsibility for the addressed policy instruments.

At date of the 2018 mid-term evaluation, the magnitude of "impact outcomes" could only be quantified very generally for projects from the 1st and 2nd calls (i.e. 37% of all envisaged policy improvements). The 2020 update evaluation is now able to determine the overall "impact outcome" envisaged by the 258 approved Interreg Europe projects and can also describe more precisely the main features of already achieved "impact outcomes".

The 258 Interreg Europe projects envisage a total of **724 policy improvements** that **are** classified **"impact outcomes" (see: Table 2).** They hold **a share of 40%** in the 1,801 policy improvements that all approved projects are currently planning and implementing or have already achieved.

- Almost 68% of these 724 policy improvements are implemented at equal proportions by partners from projects under SO1.2 (166 improvements), SO2.1 (163 improvements) and SO3.1 (162 improvements).

- Around 28% of these policy improvements are implemented by partners from projects under SO4.1 (116 improvements) and SO4.2 (85 improvements).

- With only 32 policy improvements, SO1.1 marks the last position.

Table 2 – Overview of the expected overall "impact outcome" (Status: end of May 2020)

	General features of envisaged policy improvements (PIs) classified as "impact outcome" (*)								
	Number of PIs by project calls and total for all calls					Relative importance (**)	Number of PIs by intervention focus (***)		
	Call 1	Call2	Call3	Call4	**Total calls 1-4**		Structural Funds instruments	Other instruments	Link to RIS3
SO 1.1	5	12	9	6	**32**	40%	24	8	32
SO 1.2	55	48	23	40	**166**	43%	129	37	159
SO 2.1	42	35	41	45	**163**	35%	108	55	129
SO 3.1	39	40	39	44	**162**	41%	90	72	92
SO 4.1	21	25	36	34	**116**	43%	55	61	58
SO 4.2	20	22	17	26	**85**	45%	39	46	51
All SOs	**182**	**182**	**165**	**195**	**724**	**40%**	**445**	**279**	**521**

(*) Figures relate to all 258 Interreg Europe projects and therefore include (i) achieved and already approved policy improvements, (ii) achieved but not yet approved policy improvements, (iii) currently implemented policy improvements and (iv) planned policy improvements.

(**) Share of impact outcomes in all policy improvements (impact outcomes + influence outcomes = 1,801), with the following SO-level reference totals: SO1.1 (81), SO1.2 (390), SO2.1 (470), SO3.1 (399), SO4.1 (270) and SO4.2 (191).

(***) Only ERDF- and ESF-funded programmes are considered "Structural Funds instruments" (incl. ETC programmes), whereas EAFRD and LEADER programmes are considered "Other instruments". However, iDB includes a few inconsistencies with regard to the classification of Structural Funds and ETC programmes: some ETC programmes are not marked as Structural Funds instruments, while several regional/national ERDF programmes are marked as ETC programmes.

Source: Interreg Europe impact evaluation database, established on ground of information from the iDB Excel files "Overview Policy Instruments" and "Policy Instrument Results" (Status 25/05/2020).

The relative importance of "impact outcomes" is slightly different at the level of the six SOs. An importance clearly below the SO-wide average is only observed for SO2.1, whereas for all other SOs the importance is either at the average (SO1.1) or above the average (SO1.2, SO3.1, SO4.1 and SO4.2). With respect to the latter four SOs, it can therefore be concluded that projects involve somewhat

more often institutions or organisations as partners that are directly responsible for the respectively addressed policy instruments.

Although high numbers of policy improvements classified as "impact outcomes" are found under projects from all four calls, it is striking that the number is highest in case of projects from the 4th call. This suggests either that 4th call projects have deliberately included more partners being directly responsible for the addressed policy instruments, or that the joint secretariat made a stricter selection of projects in this respect. In any case, this has had a clearly positive effect on the scope of the overall impact outcome of Interreg Europe projects. Nevertheless, this leading position of 4th call projects also implies that 27% of the overall "impact outcome" will be completed only towards the very end of Interreg Europe.

61% of the 724 envisaged "impact outcomes" address different types of EU Structural Funds instruments (i.e. 445 improvements). The large majority of the addressed instruments are national or regional ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes and related RIS3 (i.e. 441 improvements). A few improvements address ETC programmes, but exclusively Interreg cross-border programmes (i.e. 4 improvements). Bearing in mind the high number of policy improvements addressing Structural Funds instruments, it is indeed very likely that only the aggregated result contributions of the envisaged "impact outcome" might already cover larger parts of the target values Interreg Europe wants to reach until the end of 2023.

The remaining **39% of the envisaged "impact outcomes" address other national, regional and local instruments,** which also include LEADER and EAFRD programmes (i.e. 279 policy improvements in total). These policy improvements are relatively frequent under SO4.1 and SO4.2, exceeding in both cases even the number of improvements addressing Structural Funds instruments.

72% of the 724 envisaged "impact outcomes" have a link to existing RIS3 (i.e. 521 improvements). Of these RIS-related policy improvements, more than half are implemented by projects under SO1.2 (i.e. 159 improvements) and SO2.1 (i.e. 129 improvements). The remaining 45% of the RIS-related policy improvements are implemented by projects under SO3.1 (92 improvements) and SO4.1 (58 improvements), SO4.2 (51 improvements) and SO1.1 (32 improvements).

General features of achieved and already approved "impact outcomes"

Of the 724 envisaged policy improvements that are "impact outcomes", 18% were already validated by the joint secretariat at the end of May 2020 (i.e. 132 improvements).

Following this validation, each reported "impact outcome" is assessed by the joint secretariat for determining the nature of the policy change (i.e. the observed type of improvement characterising the achieved change) and for identifying its effects on RIS3 and funding for research, development and innovation (RDI). This information from iDB is shown in the overview table below (**see: Table 3**).

Table 3 – Policy improvements (PIs) that are achieved as "impact outcomes" at the end of May 2020

	Total number of PIs	PIs classified by type of improvement implemented (*) (**)				Total amount of influenced funding, in EUR	PIs with effects on RIS3 and RDI funding	
		Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Various types		PIs with change related to RIS3	PIs with direct influence on RDI funding
SO 1.1	4	1	3	0	0	1,060,000	3	2
SO 1.2	33	14	14	1	4	20,688,227	14	12
SO 2.1	26	8	16	2	0	25,576,604	2	1
SO 3.1	24	8	5	4	4	71,839,332	0	0
SO 4.1	22	8	3	9	1	12,379,251	0	0
SO 4.2	23	5	2	12	3	25,465,266	5	3
All SOs	**132**	**44**	**43**	**28**	**12**	**157,008,680**	**24**	**18**

(*) New projects (type 1), improved governance (type 2) and structural change (type 3).

(**) No classifications for "type of improvement" were elaborated in iDB for a total of 5 policy improvements. This includes 3 policy improvements under SO3.1 (i.e. BIO4ECO, project partner from Romania; BIO4ECO, project partner from Finland; SET-UP, project partner from the UK), 1 policy improvement under SO4.1 (i.e. HERICOAST, project partner from Italy) and 1 policy improvement under SO4.2 (ECOWASTE4FOOD, project partner from Finland).

Source: Interreg Europe impact evaluation database, established on ground of information from the iDB Excel files "Overview Policy Instruments" and "Policy Instrument Results" (Status 25/05/2020).

The highest number of policy improvements achieved as "impact outcome" have been implemented by partners from projects under SO1.2 (33 improvements), then followed with relatively similar proportions by projects under SO2.1 (26 improvements), SO3.1 (24 improvements), SO4.1 (22 improvements) and SO4.2 (23 improvements). SO1.1 shows again the lowest number.

50% of the achieved "impact outcomes" (i.e. 66 improvements) are related to EU Structural Funds instruments. These instruments were almost exclusively national or regional ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes and related RIS3, since only one improvement addressed a cross-border ETC programme. These 66 improvements represent already **13% of the cumulative result target value that Interreg Europe seeks to reach at the end of 2023** (i.e. 489 Structural Funds programmes to be influenced under all six SOs).

The second half of the achieved "impact outcomes" is related to other funding instruments at the national, regional or local level (i.e. 66 policy improvements in total), which also include a few LEADER and EAFRD programmes.

Most of the current "impact outcomes" have achieved policy change either by initiating new projects within the addressed policy instruments (i.e. 44 improvements of type 1) or by adapting the management of the addressed policy instruments (i.e. 43 improvements of type 2). A change in the strategic orientation of the addressed policy instruments was less frequently sought and achieved (i.e. 28 improvements of type 3). Nevertheless, Finally 12 action plan approaches achieved policy change by combining various types of improvement and also included a further 5 improvements that changed the strategic orientation of the addressed policy instruments.

The 18 mini-case studies on "impact outcomes" cover the above-mentioned types in a comparable proportion[46] and four examples can illustrate how each improvement type has worked in practice (**see: Box 2**).

Box 2 – Achieved "impact outcomes" illustrating the different types of policy improvements

The project **OSIRIS (SO1.2)** aimed at improving design, rapid delivery and implementation of Open Social Innovation (OSI) policies and action plans through co-creative regional eco-systems for innovation. Within OSIRIS, the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia addressed the Sustainable growth and jobs programme 2014-2020 of Finland. Based on the exchange and learning within the OSIRIS, the project partner gained new knowledge on open social innovation and also developed a project on that matter within the programme (type 1 improvement). Training sessions were run by the policy instrument and a call for proposals relating to open and social innovation was launched. This also led to the adoption of a new regional development project called "Capacity-building for Sino-Finnish Research Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation". The project develops the operating model of the research centre, which will boost the competitiveness of Vaasa region nationally and globally by facilitating the exploration and exploitation of market opportunities in China and by promoting cross-boundary knowledge co-creation and innovation.

The objective of the project **BRIDGES (SO1.1)** was to improve the partner regions' RIS3 implementation governance and the delivery of Structural Funds, with a view to enhance industry-led centres of competence as RIS3 implementation units. Under this project, Lubelskie Voivodeship in Poland addressed the 2020 Regional Innovation Strategy for the Lubelskie Voivodeship (RIS LV 2020) and improved the management context for this policy instrument (type 2 improvement). The Voivodeship received training within the project and the BRIDGES methodology helped the regional authority to identify innovation potentials and financing needs of local SMEs from the bioeconomy sector. For this, a total of 80 companies were included in an elaborated assessment study. Lubelskie Voivodeship also adapted certain ESIF implementation conditions to improve project financing in the bioeconomy sector (i.e. the maximum amount from ESIF was increased from 100 000 PLN to 300 000 PLN; the criterion for a maximum project duration of 6 months was cancelled) and aligned the timetable for calls launched under measure 1.5 of the ERDF regional operational programme with the BRIDGES action plan. Overall, Lubelskie Voivodeship is now better prepared to offer financing opportunities using ERDF support for SMEs in the bioeconomy sector as part of its RIS. Also local companies of that sector have deepened their understanding of what development opportunities exist for them.

The aim of the project **INTHERWASTE (SO4.2)** was to exchange experiences and to build up policy-related capacity for an efficient and sustainable management of municipal waste in order to improve the environmental performance of European Heritage Cities. Within that project, the City of Tallinn in Estonia implemented a structural change on its municipal Waste Management Plan (type 3 improvement) that was inspired by good practices in other project partner areas. After having conducted a feasibility and cost-benefit analysis on a pneumatic waste collection system in the old town of Tallinn, amendments were made to the city's new Waste Management Plan for the period 2017-2021. Two new actions were introduced as objectives into the plan: one objective foresees to create "Reuse Centres" near civic amenity sites within the city and the other aims at introducing a "Mobile Clean Point" solution. Both actions were part of Tallinn's Action Plan and funded from the budget linked to the city's Waste Management Plan in force.

The project **RETRACE (SO4.2)** promoted systemic design as a method allowing local and regional policies to move towards a circular economy and to prevent waste being released into the environment. Within that project, the Italian project partners Region of Piemonte and Politecnico of Torino addressed the ERDF programme Piemonte 2014-2020 and implemented a combined policy change including the introduction of new projects (type 1) and a change in the strategic orientation of the programme (type 3). Two new project calls were

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[46] New projects were introduced (type 1) by improvements from the projects *RESET* (SO1.1), *ERUDITE* (SO1.2), *OSIRIS* (SO1.2), *ATM FOR SMEs* (SO2.1), *CISMOB* (SO3.1), *ENERSELVES* (SO3.1), *RESOLVE* (SO3.1) and *Night Light* (SO4.1). The management of a policy instrument was adapted (type 2) by improvements from the projects *BRIDGES* (SO1.1), *URBAN-M* (SO1.1), *NMP-REG* (SO1.2), *Destination SME* (SO2.1), *SIE* (SO2.1), *SHARE* (SO4.1) and *BIOREGIO* (SO4.2). A structural change of a policy instrument was implemented (type 3) by improvements from the projects *PERFECT* (SO4.1) and *INTHERWASTE* (SO4.2). A combined policy improvement approach (type 1 and type 3) was implemented by an improvement under the project *RETRACE* (SO 4.2).

introduced under the ERDF programme, one relating to Innovation Clusters (volume of EUR 50 million) and the other to Technology Platforms for Bioeconomy (volume of EUR 40 million). Both calls also focus on circular economy, which is a direct result of the knowledge gained through the holistic diagnosis within RETRACE and through good practices existing in other project partner areas. Finally, RETRACE also led to a better consideration and direct inclusion of "resource efficiency" as a policy concept within the ERDF programme Piemonte.

Achieved "impact outcomes" and their effects on funding

Out of the 132 achieved and already approved "impact outcomes", 55 policy improvements have also influenced funding of EU Structural Funds instruments and of other national / regional / local policy instruments at a total amount of EUR 157,008,680. Of this total amount, around 46% were only influenced through policy improvements of projects under SO3.1.

50% of the total funding influenced relates to EU Structural Funds instruments (i.e. EUR 78,862,779). An influencing of EU funding was achieved by more than one third of the 66 policy improvements that addressed Structural Funds instruments (36% or 24 improvements). The amount of influenced Structural Funds support already **corresponds to 10% of Interreg Europe's cumulative result target for 2023** (i.e. EUR 768,000,000 of Structural Funds support influenced under all six SOs).

Our mini-case studies examined 13 policy improvements that addressed EU Structural Funds programmes. Among these are four policy improvements that influenced high or very high amounts of ERDF funding, which together represent 45% of the total amount influenced by all 24 policy improvements with a direct effect on EU funding (**see: Box 3**).

Box 3 – Examples for "impact outcomes" involving high amounts of ERDF funding influenced

The project **RETRACE (SO4.2)** supported local and regional policies for moving towards a circular economy. Under RETRACE, the Italian project partners "Region of Piemonte" and "Politecnico of Torino" have jointly improved the regional ERDF programme and thereby influenced a funding amount of EUR 20,241,017.

The project **ATM FOR SMEs (SO2.1)** aimed to improve the access of SMEs to microfinance in the partner regions. Within the project, the Marshal Office of Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship in Poland improved its regional ERDF programme and influenced a funding amount of EUR 7,500,000.

The project **ERUDITE (SO1.2)** promoted the development and deployment of sustainable business models for digital service by involving multiple stakeholders. Within ERUDITE, the two Slovenian project partners "Ministry of Public Administration" and "University of Ljubljana" jointly improved the national ERDF programme for 2014-2020 and influenced funding at EUR 4,880,000.

The project **ENERSELVES (SO3.1)** focussed on policies of Structural Funds and other EU instruments that support an integration of renewable energy into buildings for self-consumption. Within the project, the Marshal Office of Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship in Poland improved its regional ERDF programme and influenced a funding amount of EUR 3,750,000.

The second half of the total funds influenced (i.e. EUR 78,145,901) relates to other national, regional or local policy instruments. This influencing was achieved by 31 of the 66 policy improvements that addressed other national, regional or local policy instruments (i.e. 47%). Policy improvements addressing other instruments have therefore more often succeeded to influence funding than policy improvements addressing Structural Funds instruments (i.e. 36% see above).

However, the amounts of other funding influenced were in most cases well below one million euros. Exceptions are four policy improvements achieved within the projects *REFORM* (Project partner 6 "Transport for Greater Manchester": EUR 64,700,000), *CLUSTERIX* (Project partner 9 "Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship": EUR 3,770,000), *TRIS* (Project partners from Emilia-Romagna Region: EUR: 3,510,000) and *SKILLS+* (Project partner 6 "Trøndelag County Council": EUR 1,500,000). Their influenced funding represents around 96% of the total funding influenced under other national, regional or local policy instruments.

Nevertheless, some examples of our mini-case studies show that also improvements of "other policy instruments" with low or even no amounts of funding influenced can bring about direct changes of local or regional policies (**see: Box 4**).

Box 4 – Examples for improved "other policy instruments" with low amounts of funding influenced

Under the project **CISMOB (SO3.1),** which promoted innovative ways to reduce carbon footprint and to increase the sustainability of urban areas by improving the efficiency in the use of urban transport through ICT, the "Sustainable Mobility Strategy for the Municipality of Águeda" in Portugal was influenced. Good practices from other project partner areas inspired the Portuguese project partners University of Aveiro and Municipality of Águeda to implement a range of new local projects with a focus on sustainable mobility. One example is the tool "Águeda OpenTripPlanner", which provides information on optimal walking and cycling trails and suggests the best path to take. Another example is the "Águeda Sm@rt City Lab", which incorporated sensors in electric bicycles to monitor levels of Nitrogen Dioxide and Carbon Monoxide. This data was used for ICT applications and models that can generate a higher use of this transport mode. In addition, also pilot-projects including a car-sharing platform and a new walking trail have been presented in the municipality of Águeda. Altogether, the policy improvement has influenced a funding amount of EUR 57,000.

The overall objective of **RESOLVE (SO3.1)** is to reduce carbon emissions created by retail related traffic in town and city centres while also supporting jobs and growth in the local retail economy. Within RESOLVE, the project partner "Transport for Greater Manchester" (TfGM) in the United Kingdom has directly improved the governance of the policy instrument "Greater Manchester Strategy", in particular the strategy's priority action 4c "Provision of advice and support to increase the use or take up of renewable and low carbon fuels/energy". This was achieved by a project introducing a residential Personalised Travel Planning (PTP) offer in Stockport. PTP's are a way of sharing information directly to an audience, with the aim of changing the recipient's mode of travel to more sustainable modes. This type of activity has proven to have a positive impact on sustainable travel rates and therefore has increased the take up of low carbon energy modes. Evaluation studies on that new project have not yet taken place, though results are expected to be in line with other PTP projects that have been implemented in Manchester. The policy improvement influence funding of EUR 6,270 and the PTP project was funded by the Stockport Town Centre Access Plan. Since the Greater Manchester Strategy does not directly finance the Stockport Town Centre Access Plan, the good practice imported to Stockport has improved the delivery (governance) of the Greater Manchester Strategy.

Of the 132 approved "impact outcomes", 84 policy improvements have a general link to existing RIS3. In case of **24 policy improvements,** the **achieved policy changes** are **directly related to RIS3. Moreover, 18 policy improvements have also directly influenced RDI funding under the policy instruments addressed.**

As could be expected, this influencing of RDI funding was mainly achieved by policy improvements of projects under SO1.1 (2 improvements) and especially under SO1.2 (11 improvements)[47]. But also 4 improvements implemented by projects under SO2.1 and SO4.2 were successful in this respect[48]. Some of these projects were examined by our mini-case studies and show how the policy change was achieved (**see: Box 5**).

However, clear evidence on a net increase of RDI funding under the addressed policy instruments, and thus a proof for an impact on the investment-related headline target of the Europe 2020 Strategy (i.e. "3% of EU gross domestic product invested in R&D"), could not be found.

Box 5 – Examples for policy improvements having influenced RDI funding

Within the project **RETRACE (SO4.2),** the Italian project partners "Region of Piemonte" and "Politecnico of Torino" improved together the regional ERDF programme Piemonte 2014-2020 with respect to resource efficiency and circular economy. Inspired by knowledge gained through the holistic diagnosis of regional potentials carried out under RETRACE (and the related identification of policy gaps) and through some good practices examined, a stronger focus on circular economy was introduced into two calls for project proposals that were prepared for the regional ERDF programme (i.e. related to the RIS3 connected innovation funding schemes for "Innovation Clusters" and "Technology Platforms"). The call of the platforms-scheme focussed on three strands, one of which aimed at developing regional productive ecosystems and value chains around the concept of circular economy. 6 out the 9 projects selected for funding are focused on circular economy processes and the ERDF contribution to these projects is at EUR 20,241,017

The project **NMP-REG (SO1.2)** aims to improve regional policies for delivering innovation in "Nanotechnologies, advanced Materials and Production" (NMP). Within that project, the Portuguese project partners "North Regional Coordination and Development Commission" and "International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory" jointly improved priority axis 1 of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme NORTE 2020-2014. In conclusion, the NMP-REG project has highly improved the consideration of nanotechnologies, advanced materials and production solutions in the ROP NORTE 2020 and the topic has also become more deeply intertwined with the RIS3. A new call for proposals covering all sectors in the regional RIS3 (including "advanced priority systems") was launched and funding at an amount of EUR 1,500,000 was influenced.

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[47] Policy improvements implemented by one or more partners of the SO1.1 projects *BRIDGES* and *RESET* as well as the SO1.2 projects *Beyond EDP, ELISE, ERUDITE, FoodChains 4 EU, NICHE, NMP-REG, P2L2, P-IRIS, REMIX* and *S34Growth*.

[48] Policy improvements implemented by partners of the SO2.1 project *ATM for SMEs* and by partners of the SO4.2 projects *RETRACE, TANIA* and *TRIS*.

4.4 The expected and already achieved "influence outcome" of projects

Interreg Europe projects also implement policy improvements that come about as "influence outcomes". These policy improvements differ from "impact outcomes" since their implementation is achieved through project partners who are not in charge of the addressed policy instrument. Other external factors therefore contribute at a variable extent to the achievement of policy change.

Nevertheless, the policy change achieved by "influence outcomes" still includes direct effects that emerge from interregional and local / regional project activities implemented during phases 1 and 2. Concrete examples for such effects are increased individual and institutional or inter-organisational capacities (thanks to the completed policy learning process), a more successful roll out of action plan measures (thanks to a prior feasibility test carried out by a "pilot action") or a more committed and complete implementation of the action plans (thanks to local/regional or interregional monitoring activities that sustained momentum of the entire process).

Consequently, these direct project effects within "influence outcomes" have to be considered a part of the wider impact that Interreg Europe has on policy change.

At date of the 2018 mid-term evaluation, however, it was still difficult to disentangle both dimensions of an "influence outcome" (i.e. external contribution and project contribution) and to determine the significance of direct project effects. This situation has changed, since iDB now includes information on the extent to which direct project effects matter within already achieved "influence outcomes".

The 2020 update evaluation is therefore not only able to describe general features of the envisaged overall "influence outcome", but also to determine which proportion of the already achieved "influence outcomes" can be considered a direct contribution to the overall programme result (i.e. an impact).

Programme-wide and SO-level significance of the expected overall "influence outcome"

The 258 Interreg Europe projects envisage a total of **1,077 policy improvements** that **are** classified **"influence outcomes" (see: Table 4).** They hold **a share of 60%** in the 1,801 policy improvements that all approved projects are currently planning and implementing or have already achieved.

- Of these 1,077 policy improvements, 71% are implemented by partners from projects under SO1.2 (i.e. 224 improvements), SO2.1 (i.e. 307 improvements) and SO3.1 (237 improvements).

- 24% of the policy improvements are implemented by partners from projects under SO4.1 (154 improvements) and SO4.2 (106 improvements).

- With only 49 policy improvements, SO1.1 marks the last position.

Table 4 – Overview of the expected overall "influence outcome" (Status: end of May 2020)

	General features of envisaged policy improvements (PIs) classified as "influence outcome" (*)								
	Number of PIs by project calls and total for all calls (*)					Relative importance (**)	Number of PIs by intervention focus (***)		
	Call 1	Call2	Call3	Call4	Total calls 1-4		Structural Funds instruments	Other instruments	Link to RIS3
SO 1.1	16	16	11	6	**49**	60%	46	3	48
SO 1.2	89	59	31	45	**224**	57%	197	27	215
SO 2.1	101	74	73	59	**307**	65%	263	44	242
SO 3.1	68	69	30	70	**237**	59%	206	31	167
SO 4.1	30	30	38	56	**154**	57%	119	35	94
SO 4.2	16	33	23	34	**106**	55%	80	26	68
All SOs	**320**	**281**	**206**	**270**	**1,077**	**60%**	**911**	**166**	**834**

(*) Figures relate to all 258 Interreg Europe projects and therefore include (i) achieved and already approved policy improvements, (ii) achieved but not yet approved policy improvements, (iii) currently implemented policy improvements and (iv) planned policy improvements.

(**) Share of influence outcomes in all policy improvements (impact outcomes + influence outcomes = 1,801), with the following SO-level reference totals: SO1.1 (81), SO1.2 (390), SO2.1 (470), SO3.1 (399), SO4.1 (270) and SO4.2 (191).

(***) Only ERDF- and ESF-funded programmes are considered "Structural Funds instruments" (incl. ETC programmes), whereas EAFRD and LEADER programmes are considered "Other instruments". However, iDB includes a few inconsistencies with regard to the classification of Structural Funds and ETC programmes: some ETC programmes are not marked as Structural Funds instruments, while several regional/national ERDF programmes are marked as ETC programmes.

Source: Interreg Europe impact evaluation database, established on ground of information from the iDB Excel files "Overview Policy Instruments" and "Policy Instrument Results" (Status 25/05/2020).

The relative importance of "influence outcomes" is slightly different at the level of the six SOs. An importance clearly above the SO-wide average is only observed for SO2.1. This might be explained by the specific intervention focus (improving SME competitiveness) and the fact that SO2.1 projects "attract" more often other stakeholder organisations not directly in charge of the addressed policy instruments (e.g. chambers of commerce, development agencies, business support centres etc.). For all other SOs the importance is either at the average (SO1.1) or below the average (SO1.2, SO3.1, SO4.1 and SO4.2). In case of the latter four SOs, this means in concrete terms that projects involve somewhat more often institutions or organisations as partners that are directly responsible for the respectively addressed policy instruments.

More than half of the policy improvements classified as "influence outcomes" are found under projects from the first and second calls (56%). Their number decreases significantly under projects from third call, but increases again in case of the fourth call projects. At the level of six SOs, a continuous decline of the number of "influence outcomes" can only be observed for SO2.1 projects and to some extent for SO1.1 projects. Under all other SOs, however, the figures for the different calls are fluctuating. In the latter cases, this may suggests that a more "impact-focused" project selection would have been beneficial for maximising the projects' direct contribution to the overall programme result.

Around 85% of the 1,077 envisaged policy improvements are related to EU Structural Funds instruments. Most of these 911 instruments are national or regional ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes and related RIS3 (822 instruments), since only 29 policy improvements address ETC programmes that are either Interreg or Interreg-IPA cross-border programmes.

The remaining **15% of the envisaged "influence outcomes" address other national, regional and local instruments,** which also include LEADER and EAFRD programmes (i.e. 173 policy improvements in total). These "other" policy improvements are relatively more important only under SO4.1 (23% of all improvements) and SO4.2 (25% of all improvements). The latter aspect can be explained by the fact that not all Structural Funds programmes have selected investment priorities from TO6. This is not the case with TO1, TO3 and TO4, which are covered by the concentration principle applied in the period 2024-2020.

77% of the planned or already implemented policy improvements have a link to existing RIS3. More than half of these RIS-related policy improvements are implemented by projects under SO1.2 and SO2.1 (around 55%) and another 20% by projects under SO3.1. The remaining RIS-related improvements are implemented by projects under the other three SOs, namely SO4.1 (94 improvements) and SO4.4 (68 improvements) as well as SO1.1 (48 improvements).

General features of achieved and already approved "influence outcomes"

Of the 1,077 policy improvements classified as "influence outcomes", 17% were already validated by the joint secretariat at the end of May 2020 (i.e. 180 improvements).

Following this validation, each reported "influence outcome" is assessed by the Joint Secretariat for determining the nature of the policy change (i.e. the observed type of improvement characterising the achieved change) and for identifying the scope of direct project effects having contributed to achieving this change. This information from iDB is shown in the overview table below **(see: Table 5).**

Around 77% of the 180 approved "influence outcomes" were implemented by partners from projects under SO1.2, (53 improvements), SO2.1 (47 improvements) and SO3.1 (38 improvements). The remaining 23% are relatively evenly spread across the three other SOs, with SO1.1 showing the lowest number (12 improvements).

75% of the 180 approved "influence outcomes" are related to EU Structural Funds instruments (135 improvements), most of which are national or regional ERDF programmes (131 improvements) and a few also cross-border ETC Programmes (4 improvements). These 135 policy improvements theoretically represent already around 28% of the cumulative result target value that Interreg Europe seeks to reach at the end of 2023 (i.e. 489 Structural Funds programmes to be influenced under all six SOs).

However, not all of this "influence outcome" can be considered an impact of projects because the achieved improvement of Structural Funds instruments includes at different degrees both project-external contributions and direct project effects (see below).

The remaining 45 policy improvements are related to other national, regional or local policy instruments.

Table 5 – Policy improvements (PIs) that are achieved as "influence outcomes" at the end of May 2020

	Total number of PIs	**PIs classified by type of improvement implemented (*) (**)**				**Total amount of influenced funding, in EUR**	**PIs by level of direct project effects (*) (***)**		
		Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Various types		High	Medium	Low
SO 1.1	12	9	0	1	1	10,030,881	0	10	1
SO 1.2	53	22	19	1	7	29,753,997	11	25	13
SO 2.1	47	17	21	4	2	70,554,606	7	36	1
SO 3.1	38	14	5	4	11	210,911,544	2	26	6
SO 4.1	15	4	1	5	5	11,950,519	5	7	2
SO 4.2	15	5	0	7	1	4,667,064	4	6	3
All SOs	**180**	**71**	**46**	**22**	**27**	**337,868,611**	**29**	**110**	**26**

(*) No classifications for "type of improvement" and for "direct project effects" were elaborated in iDB for a total of 14 policy improvements. This includes 1 policy improvement under SO1.2 (RESET, project partner from Germany), 4 policy improvements under SO1.2 (i.e. ISLANDS OF INNOVATION, project partner from Denmark; OSIRIS, project partner from Greece; MANUMIX, project partner from Italy; NICHE, for project partner from Estonia), 3 policy improvements under SO2.1 (i.e. INTRA, project partner from Italy; RURAL GROWTH, project partner from Spain; INSIDE OUT EU, project partner from Sweden), 4 policy improvements under SO3.1 (OptiTrans, project partner from Spain; BIO4ECO, two times for project partner from Bulgaria; REGIO-MOB, project partner from Poland) and 2 policy improvement under SO4.2 (CircE, project partner from the UK; ECOWASTE4FOOD, project partner from Spain). No classification for "direct project effects" was elaborated in iDB for one policy improvement under SO4.1 (IMPACT, project partner from Lithuania).

(**) New projects (type 1), improved governance (type 2) and structural change (type 3).

(***) Criteria applied for judging the level of direct project effect are: (1) High (H): the policy change is directly implemented by a project partner and clearly linked to previous project activities. (2) Medium (M), with 2 possibilities: (2.1) the policy change is implemented by a project-external stakeholder organisation but is clearly linked to previous project activities; (2.2) the policy change is implemented by a project partner but other external factors have also contributed to the change. (3) Low (L): the policy change is implemented by a project-external stakeholder organisation and other external factors have also contributed to the change.

Source: Interreg Europe impact evaluation database, established on ground of information from the iDB Excel files "Overview Policy Instruments" and "Policy Instrument Results" (Status 25/05/2020).

The current "influence outcomes" have achieved policy change most often by initiating new projects within the addressed policy instruments (i.e. 71 improvements of type 1). But an improvement of the management of addressed policy instruments has also played a role (i.e. 46 improvements of type 2), in particular under SO1.2 and SO2.1. Policy change was quite often also achieved by combining different types of improvements. This is observed under 27 of the current "influence outcomes". Most frequent are dual combinations that involve type 1 and another type (22 improvements), but also 2 cases exist where project partners have used all three types[49]. A change in the strategic orientation of a policy

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[49] Policy improvements implemented by the Romanian project partner no.4 of *CISMOB* (SO3.1) and the Hungarian project partner no.6 of *LOCARBO* (SO3.1).

instrument (type 3) has taken place in 22 cases, but in addition also under a number of action plan approaches that combined various approaches (8 policy improvements).

The elaborated mini-case studies cover most of the above-mentioned types of improvement or type combinations and a few examples shall illustrate how they have worked in practice (**see: Box 6**).

Box 6 – Achieved "influence outcomes" illustrating the different types of policy improvements

The goal of the project **SMART-MR (SO3.1)** is to support Managing Authorities of Structural Funds programmes as well as local and regional authorities in improving transport policies and providing sustainable measures for achieving resilient low-carbon transportation and mobility in metropolitan regions. The Slovenian project partners "Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts" and "Regional Development Agency of Ljubljana Urban Region" addressed the national ERDF Operational Programme for the Implementation of EU Cohesion Policy in the Period 2014-2020, for which the Transport Directorate of the national Ministry of Infrastructure is acting as Managing Authority. Mobility infrastructure in Slovenia is largely financed through the ERDF-programme, but there was no planning document that defined mobility investments needed in the Ljubljana Urban Region. The project partners therefore have foreseen the preparation of a "Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan of Ljubljana Urban Region" (SUMP LUR) as one element of their action plan for SMART-MR. The mobility plan was developed on the basis of a participatory approach and has helped to re-focus and broaden transport investments supported through the ERDF-programme. This new plan not only contributes to using ERDF-resources on transport more effectively and efficiently, but also led to the adoption of further mobility investments such as the financing of cycling lines that were previously excluded from the scope of ERDF programme support (type 1 improvement).

The objective of **Night Light (SO4.1)** was to improve regional policies for reducing light pollution and for protecting / valorising dark night skies. The Luxembourg project partner "Nature Park Our" addressed the national policy instrument "State-Municipalities Climate Pact" (Pacte Climat Etat-Communes), for which the Luxembourg Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures is the responsible body. The Climate Pact includes a catalogue of 79 measures that aim to guide the municipalities of the Grand Duchy towards sustainable policy in the areas of climate change, energy and transport. The project partner "Nature Park Our" was a key driver and broker behind a structural change of this policy instrument (type 3 improvement), which anchored light pollution and its control in the catalogue of measures of the Climate Pact. This change affected 3 Climate Pact measures and also represents a financial support for Climate Pact municipalities that implement measures against light pollution (i.e. a related assessment determines the degree of certification of a municipality and the level of financial support from the state). This policy change was the result of intense talks between the project partner and various national institutions / organisations in charge of the Climate Pact. Outcomes of the national and interregional exchanges were the organisation of "Night Light Days" (27.-28.02.2019) in the Nature Park and the launching of a "NIGHT, Light & more" festival (2019-2021). The latter aims to draw the attention of residents and tourists in the park region to the issue of light pollution with a variety of high-profile events and individual projects on the themes of light, darkness and night. The Nature Park Our, with help of the regional municipalities and the national Ministry, is also pursuing some far-reaching pilot projects, such as the establishment of a regional lighting advice centre (operational since October 2019) or the completion of a digital inventory of public street lighting in the Nature Park, both of which aim at reducing light pollution.

The aim of **BRIDGES (SO 1.1)** was to improve the partner regions' RIS3 implementation governance and the delivery of the ESI-Funds. The Slovenian project partner "Soča Valley Development Centre" (SVDC) addressed the national Smart Specialisation Strategy, which is part of the Slovenian "Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy in the Period 2014–2020" that is centrally managed by the Slovenian Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy. An innovation mapping of the Goriška region showed that significant research-to-business potentials exist within the niche sector aquaculture. However, this sector did not fit into Slovenian national funding policies for competence centres and centres of excellence, which are focusing on big players and large companies. Within BRIDGES, the mechanism of community led local development (CLLD) was identified as one tool that could help bridging the funding gap for

local SMEs. Based on this idea and also inspired by a good practice discovered in Finland (i.e. Kantola wood processing industry cluster in Kainuu), "Soča Valley Development Centre" cooperated with the national-level Managing Authority and the Local Action Group (LAG) for the CLLD in Soča Valley. The aim was to change the content-related governance of the addressed policy instrument (type 2 improvement) and to launch new projects for the local aquaculture sector (type 1 improvement). The governance of the policy instrument was improved by "opening-up" the project options of the national CLLD-approach (i.e. as part of the Slovenian OP for 2014-2020 and of the related RIS3) for centres of competence that are established on ground of place-based approach. Moreover, the LAG for the CLLD in Soča Valley decided to change its local development strategy, which is the core implementation policy document of CLLD mechanisms. Once the change of the local CLLD-strategy was officially validated by the national Ministry of agriculture, forestry and rural development (April 2018), it became possible to integrate an "aquaculture centre of competence" and associated projects into the CLLD for Soča Valley and also to plan further local aquaculture development actions. Both aspects are part of the action plan for BRIDGES.

Achieved "influence outcomes" and their effects on funding

Out of the 180 policy improvements achieved as "influence outcomes", 58% have also influenced funding of EU Structural Funds instruments (82 improvements) and of other national, regional or local policy instruments (22 improvements). These 104 improvements have together influenced a total amount of funding at EUR 337,868,611. It is noteworthy that 62% of this total amount was only influenced by policy improvements of projects under SO3.1.

97% of the total amount influenced by all policy improvements with an effect on funding is related to EU Structural Funds instruments (i.e. EUR 327,863,603). An influencing of EU funding was achieved by 82 policy improvements, which shows that 61% of the 135 policy improvements that addressed different Structural Funds programmes had also been successful in this respect. With the exception of one cross-border ETC programme, this influence on funding relates only to national or regional ERDF programmes.

However, 82% of the total amount of EU funding influenced originates from only 14 policy improvements (i.e. EUR 269,219,196) that each had influenced a funding amount of EUR 5 million or more. These policy improvements were implemented under 12 projects from five specific objectives[50]. Of these 14 policy improvements with high sums of influenced EU funding, one stands out in particular: the policy improvement implemented by the Hungarian project partner of *LOCARBO,* which has alone influenced an amount of EU funding at EUR 165,200,000. This amount corresponds to half of the total EU funding influenced by all 82 policy improvements. But also three of our case study projects have influenced high amounts of ERDF funding (**see: Box 7**).

The total amount of ERDF funding influenced by the 82 improvements of Structural Funds programmes represents already around 43% of Interreg Europe's cumulative result target value for 2023 (i.e. EUR 768,000,000 of Structural Funds support influenced under all six SOs).

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[50] SO1.1 (*SmartPilots*), SO1.2 (*S34Growth*), SO2.1 (*iEER; INTRA; OSS; RCIA; SME ORGANICS*), SO3.1 (*BUILD2LC; LAST MILE; LOCARBO; REBUS*) and SO4.1 (*CD-ETA*).

Although this level of result contribution seems to be significant at first sight, it should be remembered that the contribution cannot be entirely considered an impact of Interreg Europe projects. This is because these policy improvements were achieved as a combined contribution, including different degrees of both project-external factors and direct project effects.

Box 7 – Examples for "influence outcomes" involving high amounts of ERDF funding influenced

The project **SmartPilots (SO1.1)** aimed at improving policies in support of Shared Pilot Facilities (SPF) to increase their impact on the Key Enabling technology (KET) Industrial Biotech and the bio-economy. Under this project, the Belgian Lead Partner "Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant" and the project partner "Department of Economy, Science and Innovation of the Flemish Government" have jointly succeeded to influence funding of EUR 5,190,400 under the regional ERDF Operational Programme Flanders for 2014-2020.

The project **SME ORGANICS (SO2.1)** which aimed at improving policies and programmes under the ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs goal in order to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in the organic sector. Under SME ORGANICS, the French project partner "INTERBIO Aquitaine/Limousin/Poitou-Charentes" has addressed the regional ERDF-ESF Operational Programme Aquitaine for 2014-2020 and succeeded to influence ERDF funding at EUR 16,000,000.

The project **CD-ETA (SO4.1)** aimed to improve the adoption of digitisation policy for natural and cultural heritage. Within CD-ETA, the Greek project partner "University of Patras" addressed the regional ERDF Operational Programme for Western Greece and succeeded to influence related ERDF funding of EUR 7,800,000.

Around 3% of the total amount influenced is related to other national, regional and local policy instruments (i.e. EUR 10,005,008). Among the 22 relevant policy improvements, the 10 improvements of projects implemented under SO2.1 have influenced the most significant share of this total amount (36%).

The significance of direct project effects within "influence outcomes"

For determining the extent to which "influence outcomes" are including direct project effects, the Joint Secretariat carefully analyses the evidence in progress reports submitted by projects and then allocates to each achieved policy improvement a **specific level for the observed effect (high, medium or low)[51].** This information is shown in the above overview of achieved "influence outcomes" (**see: Table 5**) and covers 165 already classified policy improvements (i.e. no classification for direct project effects was found in iDB in case of 15 achieved policy improvements).

Two thirds of the 165 classified "influence outcomes" include direct project effects that are at a medium level (i.e. 110 improvements). This means either that the policy change was implemented by a project-external stakeholder organisation but is still clearly linked to previous project activities, or that the policy change was implemented by a project partner organisation but with a

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[51] It has to be noted that a classification can also change over time, should new evidence from the next progress reports justify an upgrading or downgrading of the initially allocated level.

substantial contribution of other external factors. The dominant role of this category of "influence outcomes" is also evident at the level of all six SOs. Concrete examples for this category of "influence outcomes" are the above-presented policy improvements from the projects *SmartPilots* (SO1.1), *SME ORGANICS* (SO2.1), *CD-ETA* (SO4.1) and *BRIDGES* (SO1.1).

The remaining third of the classified "influence outcomes" include either high direct project effects (29 improvements) or low direct project effects (26 improvements):

- High direct project effects exist when the policy change was directly implemented by a project partner organisation and also shows a clear link to previous project activities, although a project-external institution / organisation was in charge of the improved policy instrument. An example for this category is the above-presented policy improvement implemented under the SO4.1 project *Night Light*, but also a policy improvement implemented under the SO2.1 project *Design4Innovation* **(see: Box 8).**

- Low direct project effects are observed when a policy change was implemented by a project-external stakeholder organisation and also included other external factors that have significantly contributed to this change. An example for this category is the above-presented policy improvement implemented under the SO3.1 project *SMART-MR*.

"Influence outcomes" with high or low direct effects occur very differently at the level of the six SOs. A specific case is SO1.2 since it includes at the same time the highest numbers of policy improvements with low and high direct project effects (11 "high" and 13 "low"). Under the other SOs, however, a higher number of cases for each classification are only found under SO2.1 (7 "high") and SO 3.1 (6 "low").

Box 8 – Example for an "influence outcome" with high direct project effects

The objective of the project **Design4Innovation (SO2.1)** is to integrate design-driven innovation for SME competitiveness into the ERDF operational programmes of participating countries/regions. The project partner from Malta, the Valletta Design Cluster (VDC) established within the Valletta Cultural Agency (VCA), addressed the national ERDF Operational Programme 1 for Malta (Priority Axis 6), for which the national Ministry of Economy, Investment and Small Business is acting as Managing Authority. The policy change was achieved by both an adaptation of the content-related management of the priority axis (improvement of type 2) and by funding a new project (improvement of type 1). This twofold policy change would not have happened had the Valletta Design Cluster not participated in the Design4Innovation project.

At the outset, the addressed ERDF programme in Malta did not include any explicit measure to support the use of design-driven innovation. Design4Innovation activities allowed VDC to gain different insights into the contribution of design practice to the general economy (interregional study visits), to establish close local collaboration with key stakeholders in Malta (e.g. University of Malta; Malta Enterprise, which is the main national enterprise promotion and support agency) and to elaborate a first-time mapping of the design ecosystem in Malta. This learning was used by VDC to coordinate with the ERDF-Managing Authority a change that was made to priority axis 6 of the ERDF programme, namely the introduction of a new possibility for funding design-driven innovation.

Based on an official recommendation of the "Coordination Committee for Sustainable Urban Development", having as task the identification of specific interventions to be funded under priority axis 6 of the programme, ERDF-funding was allocated to the establishment of a physical infrastructure for hosting the VDC. The implementation of this ERDF investment is coordinated by VDC, which also ensures that the rationale for the investment as well as the methodology for stakeholder management for the infrastructure project is directly

linked to learnings from Design4Innovation. Through the availability of a renovated workspace for the VDC, users will benefit from improved public infrastructure services for their social, cultural, and economic activities. The new site will make it possible to collaborate and develop cultural and creative projects in better conditions and in a vibrant networking environment, and with enhanced access to the wider knowledge network in the sector.

Estimating the credible contribution of "influence outcomes" to the result target values for 2023

On the basis of the above-described classification approach, it is now also possible to estimate the proportion of the "influence outcome" that should be considered a direct contribution of projects to the expected programme results (i.e. an impact, in the narrow sense of the term).

This is done by applying a **very cautious estimation approach,** in which only those policy improvements with high direct project effects are considered to make credible contributions to the programme result. These policy improvements indeed include small external contributions, but they are theoretically "eliminated" by the fact that the approach does not consider the many other policy improvements with medium or low direct project effects.

On ground of information for the 29 achieved "influence outcomes" including high direct project effects, **the current contribution to the cumulative and SO-level result target values for 2023 can be quantified as follows:**

- Of the 29 achieved "influence outcomes" including high direct project effects, a total of 23 policy improvements from five SOs addressed Structural Funds instruments (**see: Annex XII**). These 23 improvements represent around **5% of the cumulative result target for 2023 that was defined for the result indicator "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*"** (i.e. 489 programmes influenced under all six SOs). When the number of improvements is related to the different target values of the relevant SOs[52], it appears that the highest relative contribution is made to SO1.2 (around 12%). Clearly lower contribution levels are observed for SO4.2 (5%), SO2.1 (4%), SO4.1 (3%) and SO3.1 (around 2%).

- Of these 23 policy improvements, 15 have also influenced funding of the respectively addressed Structural Funds instruments that amounts to a total of EUR 27,605,730. This amount already represents around **4% of the cumulative final target value for 2023 that was defined for the result indicator "*amount of Structural Funds influenced*"** (i.e. EUR 768,000,000 for all six SOs). When looking at the different target values at SO level[53], the most significant relative contribution is again made to SO1.2 (11%). In case of the other relevant SOs, however, relative contributions are clearly lower: around 3% for SO4.2, around 2% respectively for SO2.1 and SO3.1 as well as around 1% for SO4.1.

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[52] SO1.2: 93 SF-programmes; SO2.1 and SO3.1: 123 SF-programmes each; SO4.1 and SO4.2: 60 SF- programmes each.

[53] SO1.2: EUR 144.000.000; SO2.1 and SO3.1: EUR 192.000.000 each; SO4.1 and SO4.2: EUR 96.000.000 each.

Although contributions to both result targets are for the moment still relatively low, it can realistically be assumed that the levels will continue to rise in the coming years. Even though "influence outcomes" with high direct project effects might not become numerous in overall terms, they are indeed helping to ensure that a larger part of the final programme results are actually achieved as a full impact of Interreg Europe projects.

4.5   The Policy Learning Platform and its likely impact on policy change

The different PLP services are also intended to reach out to all kinds of interested and thematically relevant organisation or individual policymakers in Europe, be they involved in Interreg Europe projects or not. Especially the PLP's good practice database and also thematic PLP publications make policy-relevant knowledge generated by Interreg Europe projects accessible to a wider target group. When local or regional actors use this knowledge for improving territorial development policies at their own initiative, then this has to be considered an "influence outcome"[54].

The situation is clearly different in case of PLP peer reviews, which are short onsite visits that are organised in principle upon request of non-project partner regions but can also be organised in regions covered by Interreg Europe projects (as long as the issue addressed is different from that covered in the related project). Peer reviews are expected to induce an interregional learning process in view of improving the implementation of ESIF programmes or of other local / regional policies for territorial development (**see: Box 9**)[55].

Box 9 – What is a PLP-peer review and how does it work?

PLP peer reviews allow managing authorities and other public bodies involved in local or regional policies for territorial development policies (host region) to receive hands on feedback and advice from experts who are coming from a selected number of other European regions (peers). The peer review examines a specific territorial and thematic context that is relevant for the host region and the peers discuss approaches, analyse the regional situation, provide solutions and formulate recommendations based on their experience and expertise. A PLP peer review is driven by the spirit of interregional learning and requires from all parties involved an overall readiness to become actively involved, to share and reflect, and to think about an improvement of policies. A PLP peer review should involve peers from at least two countries other than the country of the host region. Preparation is required on all sides to ensure the selected peers are well matched to examine the specific territorial and thematic context (needs) of the host region and to make recommendations based on their experience and expertise (e.g. by drafting a 'to-do list' for follow-up action or by giving immediate feedback). For this to be achieved, PLP experts identify suitable peers and facilitate thematic exchanges during the onsite visit.

Should a policy change emerge in the host region with regard to the specific aspects previously addressed by a PLP peer review, then this change has to be considered an "impact outcome" of the PLP. This aspect was explored by elaborating six mini-case studies on the PLP peer reviews that were carried out in the

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[54] The improvement of the policy instrument was primarily achieved by an "external contribution", although the use of knowledge from the PLP still represents a direct but low contribution of Interreg Europe.

[55] See: https://www.interregeurope.eu/peer-review/.

course of the years 2018 and 2019[56] as well as by participating in 2 "six-months-afterwards-phone surveys" organised by the Policy Learning Platform team (i.e. Gävleborg peer review; Region Hauts de France peer review).

A structured comparison of **the six PLP peer reviews** shows (**see: Annex XIII**) that all of them **have indeed attained their basic objectives in relation to the different topics addressed, but** also that **the already achieved direct policy changes are variable in the host regions.**

Most of the peer reviews addressed EU Structural Funds programmes, either at the level of thematic funding measures (i.e. peer reviews in Lille and Berlin) or at the level of specific EU-funded projects (i.e. peer reviews in Gävleborg and Sofia). The remaining two peer reviews in Eupen and Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur addressed other local or regional policy instruments.

Each peer review involved between 3 up to 7 peers from other regions and cities in Europe. The peers were either staff members from specialised units within national, regional or local public administrations or staff members from other public and semi-public bodies and organisations with a proven expertise in the respectively addressed topic (e.g. specific agencies, universities etc.). In some cases, the host organisation also directly associated other stakeholders from the local / regional context to the peer review process (e.g. peer reviews in Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur and Berlin).

Under all PLP peer reviews, the direct on-site exchanges between hosts and peers have initiated substantial learning processes. The discussed practical options for possible policy improvements (e.g. based on examples from the peers' own context) were much appreciated by the host organisations and recommendations formulated by the peers were always found very useful. In order to prepare an implementation of policy improvements, the lessons learnt as well as the received recommendations were frequently disseminated to other policy-relevant stakeholders within the host region (i.e. peer reviews in Gävleborg, Eupen and Sofia) or even to a wider audience outside the host region (i.e. peer review in Gävleborg).

The examined PLP peer reviews indeed have potentials for generating "impact outcomes", albeit at a variable scale and in different time horizons. In several cases, some of the peers' recommendations were already implemented within the addressed policy instrument (e.g. peer reviews in Lille, Gävleborg and Eupen). Other recommendations still need to be discussed further within the respective host organisations or with other relevant local / regional stakeholder organisations before they are put into practice (e.g. peer reviews in Eupen, Sofia and Berlin). Finally, there are cases where recommendations will be considered in the preparation of a new programme for the funding period 2021-2027 (e.g. peer reviews in Lille and Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur).

A final spin-off from the organised peer reviews is that many host regions wish to further deepen and sustain their implementation process. For this, they envisage cooperating more closely with other

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[56] Peer reviews in Lille / France (October 2018), Gävleborg / Sweden (January 2019), Eupen / Belgium (May 2019), Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur / France (June 2019), Sofia /Bulgaria (June 2019) and Berlin / Germany (July 2019).

relevant organisations from their region or country (e.g. Gävleborg, Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur, Berlin) and establishing new partnerships or projects with the peers from the other EU regions (e.g. Gävleborg, Eupen, Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur, Sofia).

Overall, the PLP peer review service is a useful (and so far the only) instrument that the second pillar of Interreg Europe can use for generating direct, though hardly quantifiable, effects on the programme result. The future Interreg Europe programme should therefore continue using this instrument, while further improving the systematic recording of achieved policy improvements.

4.6   Contribution of projects to EU-wide and country-level development goals

As part of the wider mission of Interreg Europe, the programme is also expected to contribute to EU-wide development goals (i.e. Europe 2020 Strategy; territorial cohesion) and to other country-level policy objectives (i.e. better delivering RIS3 or other national, regional or local strategies).

This contribution is an "influence outcome" of the achieved Interreg Europe result (i.e. the improved policy instruments), since cooperation projects are not directly inducing changes in the socio-economic or environmental conditions of the concerned project partner territories. Such territorial effects only become apparent at a later stage, once the policy-responsible project partner or stakeholder organisations have actually applied the improved instruments over a sufficiently long period of time[57].

Nevertheless, **Interreg Europe's contribution to EU-wide and country-level development goals still includes variable direct project effects** that are associated with the previously implemented project activities (e.g. policy learning process for developing policy improvement measures and monitoring of the action plan implementation).

Taking into account the above described features of "impact outcomes" (see: Section 4.3) as well as the particularities of "influence outcomes" and their classification with respect to included direct project effects (see: Section 4.4), **the Interreg Europe contribution can be considered**

- **strong,** if the previous improvement of policy instruments was mostly achieved through "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes" with high direct project effects;

- **significant,** if the previous improvement of policy instruments was mostly achieved through "influence outcomes" with medium direct project effects.

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[57] A completed improvement implies that the addressed policy instrument (and also the associated funding) can be used more effectively and/or efficiently by the authority in charge. The improved instrument can therefore better tackle problems in relevant economic sectors (e.g. agriculture, productive sector, service sector), address the needs of specific target groups in a more focussed way (e.g. SMEs, start-ups, unemployed and long-term unemployed, socially excluded persons etc.) or improve an adverse environmental situation more sustainably. However, interventions have to be carried out during a certain period of time before the associated positive effects are materialising in a given territory (i.e. higher competitiveness of companies; more jobs and lower unemployment, reduced air or water pollution etc.).

Policy instruments improved as "influence outcomes" with low direct project effects on the programme result are not considered in the following analysis[58]. This is because the credible share of Interreg Europe in the subsequently induced contribution to EU-wide goals or national/regional development objectives tends to be rather insignificant.

Contributions to better RIS3 delivery and to the smart growth priority of Europe 2020

National or regional research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) are key elements of the EU's cohesion, research and innovation policies and are therefore playing a crucial role in further developing Europe's innovation systems at the national and regional levels. By improving contents or governance of RIS3 as well as RIS3-related implementation and funding mechanisms (e.g. Structural Funds programmes), Interreg Europe projects are contributing to enhancing smart growth throughout Europe.

Interreg Europe projects achieve this contribution by providing project partners and other stakeholder organisations with an interregional space for policy learning in relation to good practices, some of which are subsequently transferred to and implemented in the project partner territories with a view to improving R&D und innovation policies.

The envisaged and already achieved policy changes of Interreg Europe projects make a strong contribution to better delivering RIS3 and to promoting smart growth. This judgement can be supported by taking a look at data from the monitoring system (**see: Table 6**).

Table 6 – Overview of policy improvements (PIs) contributing to RIS3 delivery and smart growth

	"Impact outcome"				"Influence outcome"					
	Envisaged PIs		Achieved PIs		Envisaged PIs		Achieved PIs (high project effects)		Achieved PIs (medium project effects)	
	PIs with link to RIS3	Share of total PIs	PIs with policy change directly related to a RIS3	Amount of directly influenced RDI funding, in EUR (*)	PIs with link to RIS3	Share of total PIs	PIs with link to RIS3	Amount of directly influenced RDI funding, in EUR (**)	PIs with link to RIS3	Amount of influenced RDI funding, in EUR (**)
SO 1.1	32	100%	3	1,060,000	48	98%	0	0	10	9,789,425
SO 1.2	159	96%	14	6,580,930	215	96%	10	15,495,251	24	8,415,836
SO 2.1	129	79%	2	7,500,000	242	79%	6	3,933,513	22	1,680,254
SO 3.1	92	57%	0	0	167	70%	2	N/A	14	N/A
SO 4.1	58	50%	0	0	94	61%	3	N/A	4	N/A
SO 4.2	51	60%	5	24,048,307	68	64%	3	N/A	4	920,000
All SOs	521	72%	24	39,189,237	834	77%	24	19,428,764	78	20,805,515

(*) Although the JS classification indicates that these policy improvements have influenced R&D funding (in terms of increase), it should be noted that for 9 policy improvements no influenced funding amount is indicated in iDB.

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[58] These are 26 policy improvements (all SOs) having together influenced a total funding amount of EUR 11,071,006.

The 258 Interreg Europe projects envisage implementing 1,801 policy improvements, of which 75% have a link to RIS3 (i.e. 1,355 improvements). Of the **envisaged and RIS3-related policy improvements,** 38% will be "impact outcomes" (521 improvements) and 62% will be "influence outcomes" (834 improvements). Details on these RIS3-related policy improvements show that the main contribution will in both cases emerge from improved policies supporting innovation infrastructures (SO1.1) and innovation delivery processes (SO1.2) as well as from improved policies strengthening the innovation capacity of SMEs (SO2.1). Under these three SOs, the RIS3-related policy improvements of both outcome types are always clearly above the average observed for all six SOs. But also under the three other SOs, the envisaged RIS3-related policy improvements hold remarkable shares: they range between 50% up to 70% of the total policy improvements that are foreseen either as "impact outcomes" or as "influence outcomes".

The above constellation indeed suggests "only" a significant Interreg Europe contribution, but this situation changes when the **already achieved and RIS3-related policy improvements** are examined more closely. The amount of funding for research, development and innovation (RDI) that was directly influenced by the 24 "impact outcomes" is the most important component of Interreg Europe's current contribution to stimulating smart growth in the territories of project partners. Within this context, it is also interesting to note that a larger proportion of the directly influenced RDI funding emanates from policy improvements that were implemented by projects under SO4.2. When adding to the RDI funding influenced by "impact outcomes" also the funding amount of the 24 "influence outcomes" with high direct project effects, the resulting sum of influenced RDI funding is considerably higher than the funding amount of the 78 "influence outcomes" with medium direct project effects.

The achieved content- or governance-related changes in the addressed Structural Funds programmes and RIS3 as well as the influencing of related RDI funding help using innovation infrastructures more effectively, make innovation delivery processes more focussed and create better framework conditions allowing SMEs to deliver innovative actions more swiftly. This also induces different economic "knock-on-effects" in the concerned project partner territories, for which the following box provides some examples from our case studies (**see: Box 10**). These examples highlight first territorial effects emerging from policy instruments that were improved either as "impact outcomes" (*ERUDITE; ELISE*) or as "influence outcomes" (*InnoBridge*; *ecoRIS3*).

Box 10 – Territorial effects associated with policy changes improving innovation delivery processes (SO1.2)

Under the project **ERUDITE (SO1.2),** the Slovenian project partners "University of Ljubljana" and "Ministry of Public Administration" integrated FabLab development in the implementation plan of the national Operational Programme for the 2014-2020 programming period. In 2018, also a call for "Digital Innovation

Hubs" was launched as part of the Operational Programme. The project "P5 Digital Innovation Hub (DIH) Slovenia", a direct result of ERUDITE activities in Slovenia, was selected and allocated a budget of EUR 2.6 million for the period 2019-2023. Since January 2019, DIH Slovenia is fully operational and acts as the national one-stop-shop for digital transformation of Slovenia. Today, DIH Slovenia focuses on supporting industries that are highlighted as priority in the Slovene Smart Specialization Strategy (S4), but it also includes other industries from the S4 ranging from high-tech to more traditional ones. DIH Slovenia provides links with investors, facilitates access to finance for digital transformation, connects users and providers of digital innovation, and provides synergies between digital and other key technologies.

Under the project **ELISE (SO1.2),** the project partner "Lubelskie Voivodeship" from Poland improved the regional ERDF Operational Programme (Priority Axis 1 Research & Innovation and Axis 3 Competitiveness of enterprises). ELISE project activities inspired the Voivodeship to create an acceleration instrument supporting the internationalisation and development of young companies from the regional life sciences sector. The programme "Nevada-Lubelskie Acceleration Bridge" (NLAB) establishes a new way of supporting technology companies in the implementation of R&D results and improves public policy in the field of knowledge transfer. NLAB allows for a better use of funding for entrepreneurship, the reinforcement of the R&I system, and a better inclusion of the region in the global innovation chain. Also a "boot-camp" was developed, offering training focused on the growth and commercialisation potentials of particular start-ups. The NLAB-programme is a strong asset that Lubelskie region can offer to local start-ups and represents an important advantage in the competition with other strong Polish start-up centres. A first result of the NLAB-programme is that 4 companies have received support, and an additional 6 are about to receive support. The effects of these projects will, in connection with the research and cluster infrastructure, strengthen the regional life science ecosystem.

Under the project **InnoBridge (SO1.2),** the Bulgarian project partners "Sofia Development Association" and "Applied Research and Communications Fund" improved the policy instrument Sofia Fund for Innovations, managed by the Municipality of Sofia. The policy change resulting from an implementation of the partners' InnoBridge action plan led to an improved governance of the addressed policy instrument. The thematic scope of the Fund was widened, by focussing more on digitalisation, digital skills and innovations. Another important change was the launching of additional projects on ground of two newly introduced funding measures. The "Innovative Start-up Guarantee Programme" was launched in 2018 and provides guarantees to innovative start-ups in two RIS3 priority areas, namely ICT and the creative and recreational industries. The "Accelerator Start-up Sofia" was launched in 2019 and supports innovative start-up and social entrepreneurs on the territory of Sofia Municipality. It supports entrepreneurs or start-ups for a period of 3 to 5 months in their process of preparing applications for funding from banks and investors. InnoBridge has thus helped to generate regional and intra-regional economic spill-over effects, since the Sofia start-up scene has further developed (i.e. 13 start-ups have received funding form the schemes so far).

Under the project **ecoRIS3 (SO1.2),** the Irish project partner "Cork Institute of Technology" improved the ERDF Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme for 2014-2020 by introducing a new project within the policy instrument. Interregional activities of ecoRIS3 inspired Cork City Council and its Local Enterprise offices to take action on developing co-working spaces as a means for helping companies to grow and for driving innovation. With funding support from the Operational Programme, Cork City Council established "CoWOrk City". Launched in June 2018, this modern and open plan space at the Civic Offices is available to start-up and micro enterprises in the fields of manufacturing and internationally traded services. The most notable territorial changes induced are the opening of the CoWOrk City space and the launch of the Cyber Security cluster. CoWork City has provided working space for 12 entrepreneurs, and the Cyber Security cluster has already succeeded in building a strong ecosystem of actors. 80 organisations have signed up to become members of the cluster, and over 150 attendees from industry, academia and government attended its launch event. Collaborations between members of industry and academia are expected to be reinforced, thus addressing an existing lack of connectedness among members of the innovation ecosystem.

Contributions to the inclusive and sustainable growth priorities of Europe 2020

Interreg Europe will contribute to the Europe 2020 priority on inclusive growth, which promotes a high employment economy as well as economic, social and territorial cohesion. This contribution emerges when improved policy instruments or funding measures are supporting projects that, after their completion, lead to a positive change in the conditions of groups of people addressed by the relevant EU 2020 headline targets (i.e. more people from the 20 to 64 year old population in employment; fewer people in or at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion).

Most of this contribution to inclusive growth will emerge from improved policy instruments that aim at increasing the competitiveness of SMEs (SO2.1), since the support provided to new local or regional projects can also have positive effects on employment of the working age population in a medium-term perspective. The 258 Interreg Europe projects envisage implementing 470 policy improvements under SO2.1, which represent 26% of all envisaged policy improvements (i.e. 1,801 improvements).

The Interreg Europe contribution is expected to be significant, since around two thirds of these 470 policy improvements under SO2.1 will come about as "influence outcomes" (307 improvements) and the remaining third as "impact outcomes" (163 improvements). A more or less similar constellation appears for policy changes that are already achieved by Interreg Europe projects. The amount of funding affected by an improvement of policy instruments through "influence outcomes" with medium project effects (EUR 59,977,889) was clearly higher than the aggregated funding amount achieved by "impact outcomes" (EUR 25,576,604) and "influence outcomes" with high project effects (EUR 3,428,513).

The achieved policy improvements will also induce different economic knock-on-effects in the concerned project partner territories, which can be illustrated by a policy change achieved as "impact outcome" under the project *ATM for SMEs* (**see: Box 11**).

Box 11 – Territorial effects associated with a policy change for increasing SME competitiveness (SO2.1)

Under the project **ATM for SMEs (SO2.1),** the Polish project partner "Marshal Office of Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship" improved the ERDF Operational Programme for this region. Based on the experiences gained in ATM for SMEs, two new projects were funded under Priority Axis 2 of the Operational Programme (i.e. Action 2.6 Financial Instruments for SME's) and launched in April 2018. Both projects introduced new financial instruments (i.e. loans, seed capital investments) in order to help start-ups and small enterprises in two different areas of Świętokrzyskie Region. They provide loans for investments at an early stage of business functioning (start-ups) and also at more advanced stages of business development, with a view to increase the number of innovative entrepreneurs and to stimulate the implementation of new or more advanced services and products. The expected aggregated target for both financial instruments is to provide loans for a least 359 entrepreneurs. Once these targets are reached, it is expected that the competitiveness of the local business sector is increased and also job creation is enhanced.

Interreg Europe contributes to the sustainable growth priority of the Europe 2020 Strategy, since many of the six SOs address polices and issues that help promoting a more sustainable development of regions.

Most of this contribution will emerge from improved policies supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy (SO3.1) and the transition to a resource-efficient economy based on green growth and eco-innovation (SO4.2), but also from improved policies leading to a better protection, promotion and development of natural or cultural heritage potentials (SO4.1). Moreover, policy instruments improved by projects from SO3.1 may also contribute to better delivering the three 20-20-20 headline targets of Europe 2020 Strategy. In relation to these three SOs, the 258 Interreg Europe projects envisage implementing 860 policy improvements that represent around 48% of all envisaged policy improvements (i.e. 1,801 improvements).

The Interreg Europe contribution is expected to be significant, since around 58% of the 860 policy improvements will come about as "influence outcomes" (497 improvements)[59] and the remaining 42% as "impact outcomes" (363 improvements)[60]. The stronger role of "influence outcomes" re-appears in case of policy changes that are already achieved by Interreg Europe projects. The amount of funding affected by an improvement of policy instruments through "influence outcomes" with medium project effects (EUR 210,637,420)[61] was clearly higher than the aggregated funding amount achieved by "impact outcomes" (EUR 109,683,849) and "influence outcomes" with high project effects (EUR 8,223,606)[62]. Finally, it should be stressed that within the above-described situation for the three SOs, SO3.1 always plays by far the leading role.

The achieved policy improvements will also induce different kinds of effects supporting a more sustainable development of the concerned project partner territories, which can be illustrated by two policy changes that were achieved as "impact outcome" under the project *BID-REX* and as "influence outcome" under the project *REBUS* (**see: Box 12**).

Box 12 – Territorial effects associated with policy changes enhancing sustainable development (SO4.1, SO3.1)

Within the project **BID-REX (SO4.1),** the Spanish project partners "Forest Sciences Centre of Catalonia" and "Government of Catalonia" improved the regional policy instrument "New Environmental Policy of Catalonia". In 2018, the Government of Catalonia adopted the Natural Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy of Catalonia 2030 (EPNCAT2030), which will guide the Government's nature conservation policies until 2030. Its main objective is to stop the loss of biodiversity in Catalonia and has to be considered a key step to better protecting the regional environment. During the elaboration phase of this strategy, the Catalan BID-REX partners took part in the process and pointed out the importance of reinforcing the link between biodiversity and decision-making processes. Based on different good practices identified in BID-REX, also the creation of a Catalan Natural Heritage Observatory as a hub of biodiversity knowledge was suggested during the process and finally included into action 7 of the Strategy ("Information and knowledge of natural heritage"). The approval of the Strategy as new policy instrument is a crucial step to increase the number of actions which can be funded by Axis 6 of the ERDF Catalan Operational Programme. With this Strategy and the creation of the Observatory, public actors and other stakeholders will be able to work together towards the preservation of biodiversity and reaping strong socio-environmental benefits for the regional community.

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[59] Envisaged "influence outcomes": SO3.1 (237 improvements), SO4.1 (154 improvements) and SO4.2 (106 improvements).

[60] Envisaged "impact outcomes": SO3.1 (162 improvements), SO4.1 (116 improvements) and SO4.2 (85 improvements).

[61] Achieved "influence outcomes" with medium project effects: SO3.1 (EUR 198,887,766), SO4.1 (EUR 10,804,928) and SO4.2 (EUR 944,726).

[62] Achieved "impact outcomes": SO3.1 (EUR 71,839,332), SO4.1 (EUR 12,379,251) and SO4.2 (EUR 25,465,266). Achieved "influence outcomes" with high project effects: SO3.1 (EUR 4,240,777), SO4.1 (EUR 705,492) and SO4.2 (EUR 3,277,337).

> Under the project **REBUS (SO3.1),** the Italian project partner "Tuscany Regional Agency for Waste & Resource Management" improved the ERDF Operational Programme for the Tuscany Region, while working closely with Regional Government of Tuscany acting as managing authority. REBUS motivated the project partner and the programme managing authority to develop a new call for projects on energy efficiency in public buildings, aimed at public institutions owning public buildings to be renovated through energy efficiency interventions. The REBUS experience helped to design the call and to introduce appropriate selection criteria that were inspired by examples from other project partners. The call was officially launched in July 2017 and 35 projects have been approved in March 2019 for a total cost of EUR 20.8 million. The approved projects will last for 24 months from the approval, with a possibility of 6 months extension if needed. Once finalised, these projects will lead to energy efficiency gains in the concerned public buildings (i.e. 5 projects address health care and hospital structures; 30 projects address diverse public administrations in the regional territory).

Contributions to strengthening EU-wide territorial cohesion

The afore-mentioned contributions of Interreg Europe to RIS3 and the Europe 2020 priorities on smart, inclusive and sustainable growth can also strengthen EU-wide territorial cohesion. This is the case when the diverse territorial knock-on-effects emerging from improved policies help to reduce still existing disparities in the economic, social and environmental conditions of EU regions.

Interreg Europe promotes cooperation between all regions of Europe, but at the same time ensures that within projects more developed regions are cooperating with less developed regions. It is thus of interest taking a closer look at the geographical location of envisaged and already achieved policy improvements, from which the above-mentioned territorial knock-on-effects will emerge.

However, this can only be a first and indeed very general starting point for examining Interreg Europe's contribution to territorial cohesion. Answering this question on grounds of a profound analysis of facts and data for various topics exceeds the possibilities of this evaluation, all the more because territorial effects associated with achieved policy improvements are at the moment hardly visible and also not measurable with respect to their concrete implications.

However, the joint secretariat has recently carried out an **analysis of the geographical location of 305 already achieved policy improvements (see: figures in Annex XIV)** in order to determine the proportion of policy changes that are located in each of the three types of Cohesion Policy regions: (1) the "less developed regions" with a GDP per capita less than 75% of the EU average, (2) the "transition regions" with a GDP per capita between 75% and 90% of the EU average and (3) the "more developed regions" with a GDP per capita above 90% of the EU average.

The **overall repartition** of the 305 achieved policy changes shows that a little more than half of them are located in more developed regions (i.e. 155 improvements). The remaining policy changes were primarily implemented in less developed regions (i.e. 125 improvements) and at a small proportion also in transition regions (i.e. 25 improvements).

This general pattern is more or less repeated at the level of the six SOs, albeit with some variations. The latter come to the fore by comparing the region-specific proportions for the geographical location of policy changes achieved under each of the six SOs. From this comparison emerge the following **characteristics for the three types of Cohesion Policy regions:**

- **More developed regions** account on average for 51% of all policy changes that were implemented across the six SOs. At the SO-level, these regions have strongly above-average proportions in the geographical location of policy changes for an improvement of resource-efficient economy policies (SO4.2: 59%), for an improvement of innovation delivery policies (SO1.2: 57%) and for an improvement of innovation infrastructure policies (SO1.1: 56%). The lowest proportion in the geographical location of policy changes is observed for an improvement of low-carbon economy policies (SO3.1: 42%).

- **Less developed regions** account on average for 41% of all policy changes that were implemented across the six SOs. At the SO-level, it is first of all interesting to see that this type of region has a strongly above-average proportion in the in the geographical location of policy changes improving low-carbon economy policies (SO3.1: 47%), being also higher than the proportion of more developed regions (42%). An above-average proportion also exists in case of policy changes improving natural and cultural heritage policies (SO4.1: 44%), whereas the lowest proportion is observed for an improvement of resource-efficient economy policies (SO4.2: 32%).

- **Transition regions** account on average for 8% of all policy changes that are achieved so far across the six SOs. At the SO-level, these regions have above-average proportions in the geographical location of policy changes for an improvement of SMEs competitiveness policies (SO2.1: 12%) and for an improvement of low-carbon economy policies (SO3.1: 12%). The lowest proportion in the geographical location of policy changes is observed for an improvement of innovation delivery policies (SO1.2: 4%).

These SO-level differences between the three types of Cohesion Policy regions are provisional and will considerably change once further policy improvements are reported to the joint secretariat and registered in iDB (i.e. esp. from 3rd and 4th call projects).

Since these differences nevertheless reflect specific problems and challenges that each type of region wishes to address through interregional cooperation, this characterisation may help to identify **initial trends in which regions the thematic interventions could lead to significant territorial effects (see: Box 13).**

Box 13 – Initial trends for the likely geographical location of significant territorial effects

Territorial effects in terms of improved innovation infrastructures and innovation delivery processes (SO1.1, SO1.2) tend to emerge primarily in more developed regions and to a certain extent also in less developed regions. This is because the relative proportions of policy changes achieved in more developed regions are for both SOs significantly above the respective SO-wide averages of this type, whereas in less developed regions the proportions are below but close to the average for both SOs. Interreg Europe might therefore further strengthen the already strong position of more developed regions, but also allow less developed regions to catch up with other regions through improved innovation infrastructures and a better delivery of innovations, provided that both improvements are substantial and also territorially wide-ranging.

Territorial effects in terms of an increased innovation capacity and competitiveness of SMEs (SO2.1) tend to emerge in all three types of Cohesion Policy regions, albeit at a different scope. While the relative

proportion of policy changes achieved in more developed regions is below the SO-wide average of this type, the proportions of changes achieved in less developed regions and transition regions are either at or clearly above their respective SO-wide averages. Interreg Europe might therefore create potentials that allow the latter two region types to catch up with more developed regions. A relatively similar trend is observed for territorial effects in terms of **enhancing the establishment of a low-carbon economy (SO3.1),** although in this case the catching up potential of less developed regions tends to be even stronger.

Territorial effects in terms of a better management of natural or cultural heritage assets (SO4.1) and a more resource-efficient economy (SO4.2) tend to emerge primarily in more developed regions, but to some extent also in less developed regions. This is because the relative proportions of policy changes achieved in more developed regions are for both SOs either very close to the SO-wide average of this region type (SO4.1) or even significantly above this average (SO4.1), whereas less developed regions have an above-average proportion only in case of SO4.1. Interreg Europe might therefore create an "inverse" catching up process, by which more developed regions working hard on improving their environmental quality come closer to less developed or transition regions where environmental conditions are often better.

5 Operational evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme

The update of the operational midterm evaluation shows that the management and operational level of the programme works fine and is evolving and growing with its tasks. As the context of the programme and the programme itself evolve there are constantly possibilities for adjustments and improvements.

However, there is no need for changing the management and operational routines. As there are no formal reasons for change, the aim of this update of the operational evaluation is merely to raise possible points for reflection and help the programme to ensure it evolves along the desired lines, also in future. To encourage a wider scope of these reflections, the operational evaluation also includes some text boxes with inspiration from external sources.

The update of the operational mid-term evaluation is based on document studies[63], a survey to monitoring committee members carried out in May 2020 (**see: Annex XV**), a survey to project partners carried out in April 2020 (**see: Annex XVI**), interviews with members of the management team of the Policy Learning Platform, talks with the joint secretariat, and a workshop with the joint secretariat (June 2020).

5.1 Programme management and steering

Overall, the programme appears to be highly professional and rather exhaustive in the way it steers and manages its tasks. About ¾ of the monitoring committee members responding to the survey do not see any need for substantial changes in the programme management. Possible areas for change mentioned in

> **Questions of the ToR**
>
> - Should the management structure be revised?
> - Should the programme steering be revised (i.e. should the programme rules of procedure be modified)?
> - Should the TA resources be used differently?

the survey include a strengthened exchange about varying points of position and understandings in the monitoring committee, allowing also for open and provocative discussions.

Going into somewhat more detail, the monitoring committee considers the programme management to be on track, e.g. in relation to:

- **Information they receive:** The monitoring committee is satisfied with the level of information it receives concerning programme management and financial progress. Indeed, in the survey most respondents indicated that they are very satisfied.

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[63] The documents analysed are the 'Communication Strategy 2014-2020' (January 2016), the 'Digital Communication Strategy' (October 2015), the 'Policy Learning Platform – Evaluation Report' (April 2019), the 'Policy Learning Platform Annual Implementation Report' (July 2019), the 'Policy Learning Platform Interim Implementation Report' (January 2020), the 'Programme Assistance Evaluation' (September 2019), the 'Programme Event Evaluation' (April 2019), the 'Programme Implementation Report for 2018' (June 2019), the 'Programme Manual' (March 2019), the 'Progress Report template' (June 2019), the 'Project Seminar Evaluation' (January 2019) and results of the programme preparation survey (April 2020).

- **National Points of Contact:** 50% of the monitoring committee members responded that the role of the national points of contact should stay as it is, while 46% advocate a stronger role. Possible fields mentioned for strengthening the role of national points of contact include targeted seminars to beneficiaries, support for communication activities, more engagement with projects to facilitate dissemination of project results.

The monitoring committee is also an important player for ensuring the programme's relevance and anchorage in the wider policy debate and among decision makers. Therefore, the survey included a few questions on the 'ownership' and perceived importance of the programme. The answers reveal a positive picture, however with scope for improvements. As the below figures show, 1/3 of the respondents are very satisfied with the sense of ownership and 2/3 are rather satisfied.

Figure 1 - Level of satisfaction towards sense of ownership over programme development and implementation

As a MC member, how satisfied are you with your sense of ownership over the programme development and implementation?

- Very satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied
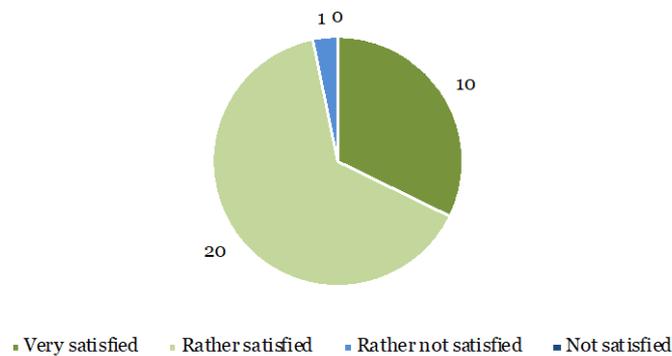
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=31)

Figure 2 - Importance of Interreg Europe in the organisation

Compared to the dossiers / files you are in charge of, how important is Interreg Europe in the eyes of your hierarchy?

- The most important dossier
- A rather important dossier
- A rather less important dossier
- The least important dossier
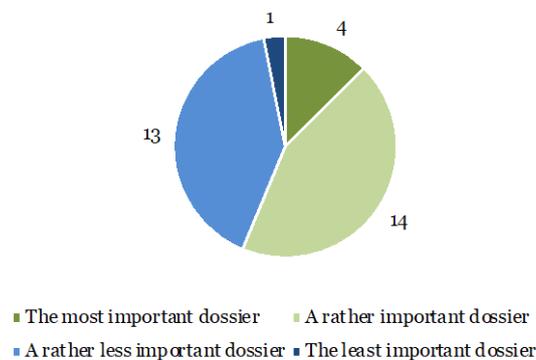
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=32)

Figure 3 - Personal importance of Interreg Europe

Compared to the dossiers / files you are in charge of, how attached are
you personally to Interreg Europe?

- Interreg Europe is "my baby"
- It is one of my favorite dossiers
- I am attached to this dossier
- It is just one of many dossiers I am charge of
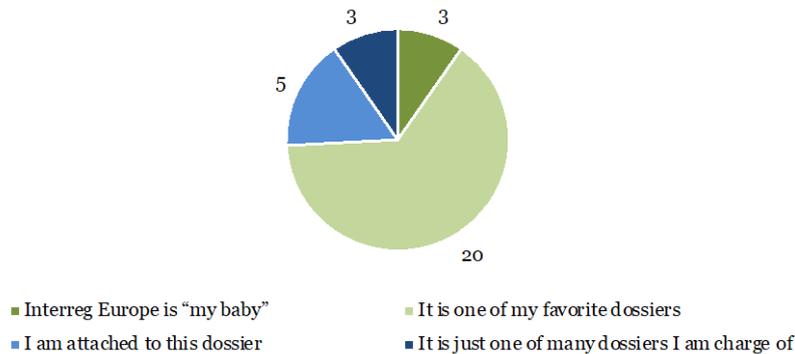
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=31)

Asked for the importance given to Interreg Europe in the hierarchies of the various monitoring committee members, 18 out of 32 respondents acknowledge that they regard it as important dossier, while 13 regard it as rather less important and one respondent mentions that it is the least important dossier in the eyes of their hierarchy. This is certainly just a rough indication. Still, it shows that Interreg Europe might benefit from some efforts to increase its importance at this level.

It should also be mentioned that one respondent specifies that Interreg Europe demands less efforts compared to other Interreg programmes and mainstream Cohesion Policy programmes that are managed from the same office: "Interreg Europe is anyway well managed".

Asked about their own personal attachment to Interreg Europe, 20 out of 31 monitoring committee members responded that Interreg Europe is one of their favourite dossiers and they like working on task for the programme. One respondent specified its answer: "it is just one of the many dossiers but I'm still attached to this one".

This poses questions as to whether more focus and more active engagement of the community would allow to strengthen the programme, create a stronger ownership in the community and possibly even strengthen the use of the deliverables of the programme and its projects . This, however, would probably go hand in hand with lowering expectations on the level of perfection and allowing for more focused approaches, i.e. being more target and selective, and the less all-encompassing in the steering and controlling of activities.

Summing up the programme management and steering works fine and the document analysis shows a highly professional joint secretariat, characterised by high levels of ambition and perfection. This however also comes with some risks, such as:

- high pressure on the programme management and staff at the joint secretariat,

- high focus on details which outshine the actual focus and overall success of the programme, and

- less active role of the community, incl. project partners, monitoring committee members, national points of contact etc., as they develop expectations towards the programme which allow them to react (rather than act) and in parts become consumers (rather than producers) of the programme.

Inspiration from "abroad" – Community of Practice

Communities of practice are groups of people sharing the same concern or passion for something they do and interact regularly to learn how to do it better. Communities of practice share a feeling of 'belonging' being developed bottom-up by people who share same interests and wish to co-create experiences and practices together, as well as builds relationships to share knowledge, develop knowledge and have a mutual exchange. Not every community or every practice is necessarily a community of practice. A community of practice builds on the combination of three essential elements (Wenger & Trayner, 2015):

- the domain, i.e. a community of practice has a shared domain of interest;
- the community, i.e. the willingness to learn from each other and engage in joint activities; and
- the practice, this means that the people comprising this community are also practitioners, developing a number of resources, as tools, experiences, shared practices.

To cultivate or support the emergence of a community of practice, seven umbrella principle can be important (DISCUSS Project & Doyle, n.d.): i), the capacity to adapt, ii) the facility for open dialogue within the community and outside, iii) different levels of participation, iv) development of public and private community spaces, v) creation of opportunities for participants to discuss the value and productivity of their participation in the group, vi) the combination of familiarity and interest and vii) creating a natural rhythm for the community.

Figure 4 - Communities of practice
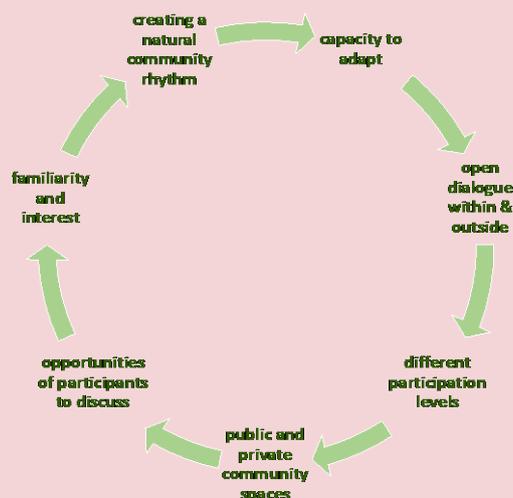
Source: Spatial Foresight based on DISCUSS Project & Doyle

Inspiration from "abroad" – Discussions in the monitoring committee

The balance between open wide discussion and convergence of opinions preparing for census can be a challenging issue in large decision-making fora such as the Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee. The diamond model used in design thinking can be a useful conceptual model to clarify which debate is about widening the scope and getting new ideas, and which debate is about closing the debate and finding an agreement. In most cases this can be done first for understanding and framing the challenge to be addressed and thereafter to find the solution on how to address the challenge. This is called the double diamond (see figure).

Figure 5 - Design Thinking Double Diamond
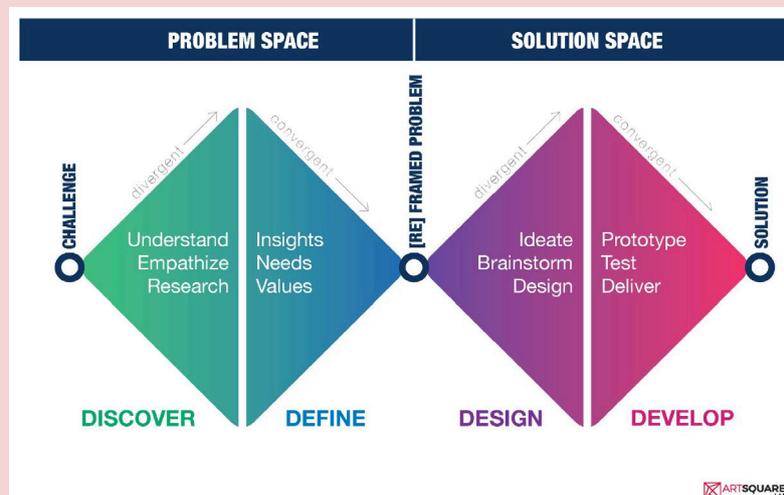
Source: ArtSquare Lab

Some basic leads for these approaches:

- **Rules for divergent debates:** refrain from judgments, quantity over quality, search for crazy ideas, build what you have, make links between things, etc.
- **Techniques for divergent debates:** brainstorming, breakout groups, get out of the comfort zone, wild cards, scenarios, provocation, gaming, etc.
- **Rules for convergent debates:** use positive judgments (rather than searching weak points), target orientation, reflect 'news value', improve ideas (an idea does not have to be a solution), act consciously and carefully (don't fall in love or reject too quickly), etc.
- **Techniques for convergent debates:** dot voting, clustering, prioritisation, Benny Hill sorting, role plays, prototypes, etc.

More sources at ArtSquar and Rustler Thinking Tools for Creativity and Innovation.

5.2 Programme support to operations

A primary aspect of Interreg programme management is support for operations. The projects are the heart of a programme, so the majority of programme resources and processes are dedicated to supporting the elaboration of applications, selection and monitoring once projects are approved.

The update confirms the overall finding of the mid-term evaluation that the programme processes to support projects work as expected, effectively and efficiently. The projects highly appreciate the support.

Overall, the programme support to operations works well, as already highlighted in the mid-term evaluations. The survey to project partners shows very high levels of satisfaction from the support during the application process to the support for the project implementation and the transition from phase 1 to phase 2.

Although reporting is generally not the most appreciated feature of an EU funded programme, the project partners signal that iOLF is an appreciated tool which should be kept.

There is no reason to revise the overall programme support to applications and beneficiaries, although further improvements are possible here and there (for details, see: **Annex XVI**).

Going into somewhat more detail the document studies and surveys suggest the following:

- **The supporting tools for project generation** should be continued, as they are overall well appreciated. Possible improvements suggested in the survey are related to the following points:

  - Limiting the access to the partner search tool to the primary target group of the programme, e.g. excluding consultants or at least distinguish between primary and secondary target group.
  - Check whether the self-assessment tool can be further developed and improved, preferable in a collaborative process with selected project partners.
  - Check the possibility to add a pre-dating / information function to the event registration, i.e. a function which allows registered to participants to indicate certain interests so that it would be easier for the community to search for relevant contacts and make connections with the others even more actively before, during and after an event.
  - Continue to keep possible incoherence between the feedback provided by the joint secretariat and the evaluations of project applications to a minimum and make sure project applicants are aware that these incoherencies cannot be avoided.

> **Questions of the ToR**
>
> - Should the overall programme support to applicants and beneficiaries be revised?
> - Should the supporting tools for project generation (e.g. webinars, online self-assessment tool, partner search tool, project idea feedback, and national info days in Partner States) be continued?
> - Is there any way to improve the project assessment?
> - Should the supporting tools for project implementation (e.g. reporting, mid-term review) be continued?
> - Should the rules and procedures for programme beneficiaries be further simplified, taking into account the regulatory framework?

- **The project assessment is clear and transparent** according to the project partners, i.e. the approach taken by the programme should be continued. Producing high quality assessments needs resources, internal organisation and time. The joint secretariat efforts to clearly communicate the time needed for the various steps should be continued.

- **The support to the project implementation is well appreciated** and all support tools received positive feedback from the project partners. The key message to the programme is to keep up the good work.

  - strengthen information efforts on existing tools and templates for projects to increase the awareness about them among project partners;
  - clearer instructions on action plans;
  - support on project management and the project partnership;
  - earlier mid-term review of projects;
  - more flexibility between phase 1 and 2 for timing, budget planning and types of activities;
  - better criteria for phase 2 pilot actions.

5.3   Programme support to Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is an important feature of Interreg Europe which has been introduced in the current programming period. It opens up the programme's knowledge to all project partners and the wider community of regional policy stakeholders. In doing so, the Policy Learning Platform facilitates learning among policymakers and practitioners dealing with regional development and helps them improve the design and implementation of their policies.

> **Questions of the ToR**
>
> - Should the way the Platform is integrated in the programme (i.e. externalisation to sub-contractors) be revised? If yes, which other model can be envisaged?
> - Should the PLP services be maintained to the same extent (or at all) with limited financial resources for the future programme?

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform is an innovative and evolving tool. Today it is highly appreciated among its users.

After a difficult starting phase for the Policy Learning Platform, the approach was modified in 2018. This included switching from passive capitalisation to active capitalisation, involving external stakeholders and engaging users with a bottom-up approach (see mid-term evaluation). The 2018 Implementation Report says that the "implementation of the Policy Learning Platform (PLP) remained challenging in 2018" and that the joint secretariat was more deeply involved in the day to day management than envisaged. However, the report points out that changes in the management on the side of the service provider helped to improve the situation in the second half of 2018. Based on the lessons learned – presented in the ToR MS2-14C018 – the new service contract for the Policy Learning Platform allowed to master the challenges faced in the first phase.

Generally, the joint secretariat takes an agile approach to the stepwise development and management of the Policy Learning Platform. In this way, it tries to react to changing demands and the growing maturity of the target community. This is e.g. reflected in

- **adjustments and improvements of the services** offered under the Policy Learning Platform (e.g. in relation to the peer-to-peer review and help desk functions)[64] and the topics addressed;

- **evolving character from expert-driven to a more community-driven,** with the role of experts growing from being providers of expert knowledge to being facilitators with expert knowledge; and

- **feedback from projects through** three questions on the Policy Learning Platform in the progress report of the projects[65].

The evolving and innovative character also leads to questions as regards the purpose and target group of individual services, the changing roles of players involved, the community building as well as the management.

Services & target groups. Given the agile and evolving character of the services and their focus, it might be wise, every now and then, to step back – in particular in the light of the preparation for the next programming period – and for every service consider:

- the exact purpose of the service offer;

- the target group, (see section on target group below);

- the input on which the service is based, i.e. (a) Interreg Europe projects, (b) expert inputs by the Policy Learning Platform team, and/or (c) inputs from the wide community;

- the balance between (a) community-driven and (b) expert-driven learning and community building.

Services	Output		Input	
	Purpose	Target group	Role of expert	Role of project partners
Webinars				
Workshops				
Peer reviews				
Good practices				
Policy briefs				
Helpdesk				

Community building and interaction. The changing character holds the potential to strengthen the community and increase the 'ownership' of policy learning, dissemination and capitalisation in the community. In other words, it holds the potential that community members will support the policy learning out of own interest and not just consider it a task of the programme or something done for the programme. The original set up of the Policy Learning Platform was probably rather inspired by the idea

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[64] Among others e.g. the helpdesk service changed from being an expert-helpdesk to being primarily a community helpdesk.

[65] Originally there was only 1 question, following the mid-term evaluation it has been expended to 3 questions. These responses are discussed regularly between the Joint Secretariat and the "Service Provider" to strengthen the bottom-up and demand driven approach.

of capitalisation of the Interreg Europe programme and projects. As the Policy Learning Platform evolves the community-driven dimension grows stronger, as e.g. shown by the peer-reviews. How members of the community exchange and learn from each other is a feature which holds untapped potential. To further unleash the potential, it might help to give more room for interaction within the community in the context of exiting tools of the Policy Learning Platform or consider the development of additional tools in cooperation with members of the community. This might also imply an evolution towards more personalised services, building on co-creation with members of the community (e.g. peer review, helpdesk, matchmaking)[66], rather than 'off the shelf offers'[67] where community members are merely consumers.

Changing roles. As the services and character of the Policy Learning Platform evolves and adjusts to needs and emerging realities also the roles of the various players change and evolve. This concerns not at least the community, experts, management team and joint secretariat.

- **Community members and target groups.** The evolvement of a stronger community and community-driven approach leads also the question of the target group. At present it seems the Policy Learning Platform is mainly serving three partially overlapping target groups, i.e. (a) Interreg Europe project partners, (b) ESIF Managing Authorities, other (c) players in the field of regional development. However, the profiling of the services towards the individual target groups is not always obvious for an outsider. Another possible differentiation of target groups distinguishes between internal and external policy learning processes (see graphic). In this sense internal policy learning addresses the mutual learning among Interreg Europe project partners with the potential support by thematic experts. External policy learning opens this internal process to external players. It allows them to join in and learn in the interaction with Interreg Europe project partners and thematic experts. More clarity on the target group for each of the services offered might help to better profile them (see above).

Figure 6 Internal & external policy learning

Source: Spatial Foresight
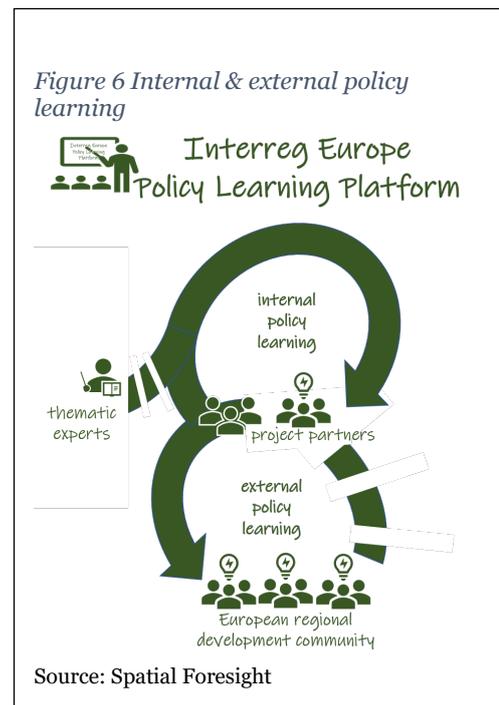
- **Thematic experts.** The role of the thematic experts has changed over time, as mentioned above. Thematic experts are no longer just experts on their topic, but increasingly also process facilitators. Importantly, the thematic expertise is considered a precondition for the facilitation tasks. In the

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[66] The results of the programme preparation survey (April 2020) mention e.g. chat room where interest groups can deepen their changes, or a service presenting a problem to the Interreg community so anyone could provide potential solutions.

[67] The results of the programme preparation survey (April 2020) mention critical voices concern the necessity and added value of the policy briefs and good practice database.

interviews it was mentioned that having teams of 2-3 experts – with complementary competences – for each thematic has proven successful. It allowed for each thematic to have more 'knowledge-oriented experts' as well as more 'process-oriented experts'. These incremental changes might be further explored in future to strengthen the possibility of thematic experts to help the development of communities of practice.

- **Management team.** There is agreement that the introduction of the management team smoothened the work for the Policy Learning Platform. However, there is a discussion whether it being part of the service provider leads to duplication of efforts. An example for such a duplication is the quality control of written materials provided by the thematic experts which is first controlled by the management team (within the consortium) and thereafter by the joint secretariat. This example illustrates inefficiencies in the current workflow. It binds a lot of human resources to duplicate tasks, risks to weaken the position of the management team in relation to the thematic experts, and limits the degree of ownership assumed by the management team. This – alongside with other issues – raises the question on how to better balance between the management team and the joint secretariat (see also section on steering).

- **Joint Secretariat.** Throughout the evolution of the Policy Learning Platform the role of the joint secretariat has changed and evolved, not at least in relation to the management team of the Policy Learning Platform. More importantly, however, the role of the joint secretariat in general evolved with the introduction of the Policy Learning Platform. Character, management and control mechanism for a service such as they Policy Learning Platform are substantially different from what the joint secretariat was used to for its support to projects and its communication activities. This is an on-going learning process. It also includes finding a common understanding with the management team (see also section on steering).

Steering and management. The innovative and evolving character and changing roles reflect also on the management approach. Flexibility is important to allow for agile responses and a needs-driven evolution of the Policy Learning Platform. This requires a close cooperation between the joint secretariat and the management team running the Policy Learning Platform. For the further development a few points of reflection have been raised in the interviews:

- **Micro-management versus unlocking the full potential.** The joint secretariat is very engaged in the development and implementation of the Policy Learning Platform and a good support to the consortium. However, in the interviews the impression emerged that at times the joint secretariat risks to engage with micro-management rather than focusing on its role as a client. This risks that the full potential of the Policy Learning Platform does not unfold. Indeed, the role of a client for a service delivery is different from the role of a provider of subsidies for projects. Checking whether a delivery corresponds to what has been agreed rather than engaging in the details of the delivery process can be a challenge. However, in a trusted cooperation each part should know its role and leave the other parts the freedom and flexibility to do as they think is best, experiment,

innovate and learn. However, trust is a fragile good which has to be built up over time, as it needs to be earned and can easily be jeopardised. Overall, there is a balance to strike. An external judgement of this balance goes beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, from the outside it can be noted that not all parties believe the perfect balance, e.g. as concerns the autonomy and decision-making competence of the management team, has been found yet.

- **Defining targets and quality standards.** Possible discussions might also involve a clear division of labour and steering via agreements on targets and objectives in line with the principles of the Open Method of Coordination (in terms of parametric governance – see text box). The discussions might also involve possible organisational changes e.g. concern the location of the management team in the consortium or as part of the programme administration.[68]

- **Contractual arrangements.** As the Policy Learning Platform evolves with the programme, its community and demands and the team is responsive to changing situations, the contractual arrangements require flexibility. As the role of experts and thus also the type of expertise required may change over time the arrangements via a framework contract seem generally suitable. A framework contract on the various types of services and a clear price for every service type allows for high flexibility, as the programme can request services when they are needed and budget according to the price list. In the interviews concerns were expressed as to whether the current format of the framework contract offers sufficient flexibility. Nevertheless, it might be wise to also use the framework contract approach in future, possibly with a stronger focus on parametric governance and different ways how to define services which can be ordered under the framework contract allowing for more flexibility (see text box).

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[68] Possibly, such an internalisation could also help to reduce the micro-management point above, as could limit the duplication of work and increase feeling of ownership and freedom to experiment within the framework of the programme.

**Inspiration from "abroad" – Parametric governance**

Parametric governance builds on steering through quantifiable and measurable objectives, leaving it open to the implementing bodies how the objectives may be achieved. While this may sound simple, the setting of meaningful and measurable targets is not straight forward. It might help to allow for sufficient time and dialogue for defining expectations in terms of objectives, results and quality.

Firstly, defining what the Policy Learning Platform shall deliver. This implies breaking down what measurable results exactly are expected (see middle box of Figure 7). This may concern the development of various modules, delivery of these modules, thematic and policy inputs, facilitation of community building activities, technical platforms, virtual events, physical events, databases). Secondly, for each of these deliverables, there needs to a clear set of criteria defining the expected quality standards (left-hand box). This may range from number and type of participants, satisfaction of participants, learning success, linguistic standards, media coverage, to scientific or process management standards. Thirdly, the joint secretariat might want to draw up a list of aspects it wants to see ensured, i.e. would do if itself would deliver the service (right-hand box). This may include particular working steps and routines, management details, particular wording, layout details etc.

There needs to be a clear agreement between the joint secretariat and the management team on the quantifiable results (middle box), the quality criteria (left-hand box) and what happens in case these are not met. However, the implementation aspects (right-hand box) are completely up to the management team. It is just recommendable for the joint secretariat to note down these in the beginning and double check whether any of these might actually be quality criteria and thus included in that list (left-hand box).

Figure 7 - Steps towards parametric governance

Defining what the PLP team shall accomplish ...

Quality criteria describing the result to be delivered	Quantifiable / measurable result you want the PLP to deliver	Implementation aspects you want to see ensured when delivering the result
• ... • ... • ...	• ... • ... • ...	• ... • ... • ...
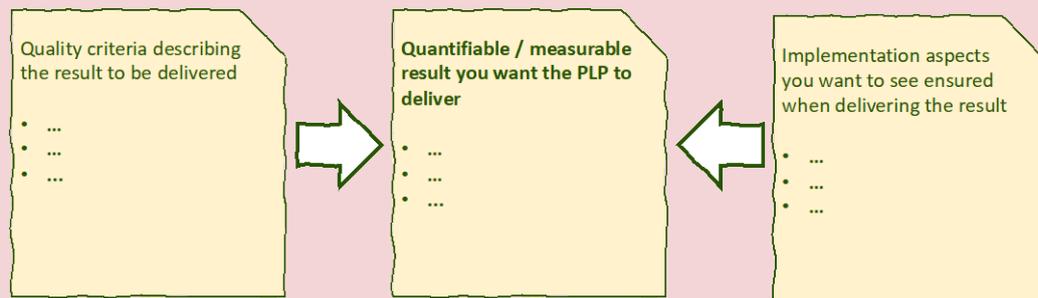
Source: Spatial Foresight

Inspiration from "abroad" – Use of framework contracts

A few examples of framework contracts used in other contexts maybe can support a discussion on possible changes in future:

EIB fi-compass. The framework contract comprises the fulltime coverage of the management team in the consortium (which in parts has to be present at the EIB premises) and a general agreement on the services to be delivered and day rates for different types of experts. For every service (e.g. a publication, conference, set of seminars), the EIB issues a service request to the consortium. The consortium provides a proposal incl. a detailed explanation of the service planned, the person days, day rates and external costs needed. On this basis, there is a discussion and fine tuning of the service and price before a final agreement is reached and the service is commissioned. This is done on rolling basis for every service request, i.e. not on annual basis. The payment is based on a reporting of actual days needed per person (accounted for according to the pre-established day rates) and external costs, upon to the level agreed up when the service was commissioned. (This type of framework contract is similar to the one of Interreg Northwest Europe for the mid-term evaluation.)

CIPU – Luxembourg´s Urban Policy Platform. The framework contract concerns a series of seminars, conferences, publications and meetings. In the contract the price for every individual item which might be requested by the client is defined. There are fixed lump-sum prices for seminars of a particular size, for conferences, reports, factsheets, as well as for managerial activities such meetings with the Steering Group, etc. Every year, an annual programme is defined which outlines the envisaged activities and ambitions. The payment is based on the actually requested and conducted tasks in accordance with the pre-defined price list for each item. In case a request does not fully correspond to any of the pre-defined items, a price is negotiated in relation to the pre-defined price list and its price levels. (This type is very close to the ESPON framework contract on external expertise support for drafting ESPON synthesis reports, briefings, etc.)

5.4 Communication strategy

The mid-term evaluation presented a number of recommendations for strengthening the communication of the programme. As the programme carries out a separate analysis of its communication activities, the update only addresses selected aspects of the communication efforts.

Interreg Europe communicates actively and widely. Some of the key reflections concern the varied expectations, social media, strategic communication and indicators.

Questions of the ToR

- Should the programme communication strategy be approached differently?
- Should the resources to the communication mix (use of online tools, events and meetings, approach to public and media relations) be adapted? Should other tools be added to the mix?
- Should the programme/ project/ Platform communication indicators change?

Varied expectations. The wide range of topics addressed by Interreg Europe, the different types of activities and achievements, and the diverse target group with partially overlapping segments (see graphic) imply a wide range of different expectations to the programme's communication efforts. The survey to the monitoring committee members highlight the strong expectations when it comes to increasing awareness about good practice. However, also the other objectives related to particular players in the field and the awareness about the programme in general are regarded as highly relevant. Given diverse target groups and expectations, the programme's strategy to employ a wide range of different communication tools appears meaningful and should be kept. Indeed, all respondents to the survey to the monitoring committee (29/29) think that the programme's communication tools developed during the present period (e.g. on-line tools, hosting projects website) should be kept for the future.

Figure 8 - Interreg Europe target Groups
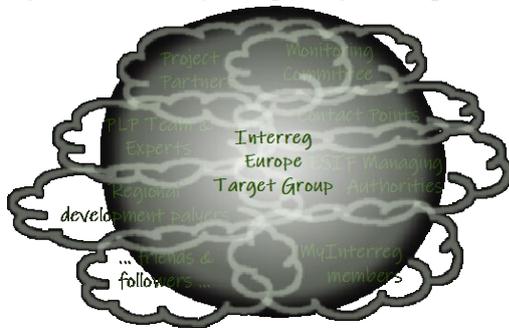
Source: own elaboration

Figure 9 - MC responses on communication activities
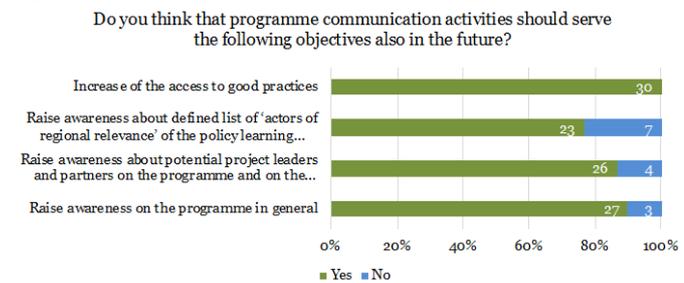
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

**Social media.** Digital and Social media communication has become an important communication tool for reaching a wider audience or targeting existing audience so as to raise awareness, increase the impact or disseminate the project results and other activities. This has not at least been reemphasised by the COVID-19 pandemic which made face-to-face events impossible for some while. Although Interreg Europe is very active in the field of digital and social media communication, it is a field which will need further development and emphasis in the years to come. This is simply due to changing framework conditions, emerging technologies and user expectations. Interreg Central Europe is one of the programmes which might be worthwhile looking at for further inspiration for strategic and integrated approaches to communication and social media (see textbox).

Inspiration from "abroad" – Social media in Interreg Central Europe

Among the general rules for starting the use of social media are i) develop a social media strategy to develop a common agreement on messages, role responsibilities, time, content type etc., ii) choose the right social media platform, iii) decide on the person in charge, iv) identify and build the audience and target group, v) decide on the appropriate style, tone and content and vi) develop practices that measure the impact and performance, i.e. develop some own impact criteria and build key performance indicators to compare this impact, which can include both quantitative aspects (number of clicks, likes tags etc.) and qualitative (types of comments, tone etc.) and hence monitor the performance (based on European Commission, Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, 2020).

The communication strategy of the Interreg Central Europe programme includes digital / social media activities, as well as targeted events and trainings on the use of social media, for the dissemination of results, but also for community building activities. The communication of the programme's results is based on a well-defined and integrated approach. An inspiring practice is the programme's social media monitoring tool. It is a simple monitoring excel platform, which tracks the social media use and content through different time periods. This allows for visually representing in graphs and figures the social media use, without any complex IT systems. The communication tools need to be user-friendly, up-to-date and well-targeted to increase the outreach to new groups and applicants, allowing at the same time interaction and participation, such as particularly events and social media.

*Figure 10   Interreg Central Europe – Social media tool*

Source: Interreg Central Europe

Strategic communication – addressing key players. At a more general level – and going beyond regulatory requirements –, there is room for improvement on the communication beyond the immediate target group of the programme. The programme's 'Communication Strategy' distinguish between various target groups, and their level of engagement and influence. However, it appears that the positioning of the programme at the level of key decision makers can be strengthened through targeted reputation management. In the survey monitoring committee members offered several suggestions how to strengthen the strategic reputation of the programme, especially among key decision makers shaping EU regional policy. These suggestions include among others following

- **Involve key players**
  - Invite them to more events so that they can develop a sense of ownership
  - Important that they are directly involved e.g. in projects etc.
- **Explicitly target key players**
  - Keep them informed in short, simple messages (KISS)
  - Targeted presentations/conferences PLPs/programmes for key decision makers
  - Organise info and dissemination sessions for relevant EP committees and EC services
  - MC members to promote the programme to their top management and ministers
  - JS should be more coming to countries and have face to face communication
- **Sell your relevance**
  - Keep highlighting the policies that have been influenced due to Interreg Europe
  - Stronger reference to territorial needs and many policy agendas
  - Communicate on real life issues rather than technicalities
  - Communication events for general public on benefit for the citizens

Possibly the programme can learn something about strategic communication to ensure its positioning in the European decision-making context from Thematic Smart Specialisation Networks or EU Macro-regional strategies or ESPON. In all these cases target actions have been undertaken to approach and communicate directly with high level key decision makers (e.g. EU Commissioners, prime ministers and ministers). The main aim was to make sure one is known to them and that a positive attitude reflects on other key players. A stakeholder mapping clarifying its own community, powerful decision makers who are aware and supportive to the programme, and powerful decision makers who are unaware or sceptical, can help to identify whom to target with the strategic communication efforts. It can further be the first steppingstone to see which members of its own community and supportive decision makers can help addressing sceptical players (see figure).

Figure 11 - Stakeholder mapping
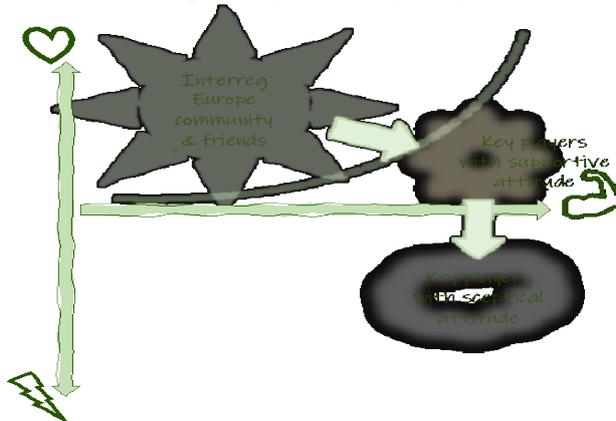
Source: Spatial Foresight

Strategic communication – relevant topics. Interreg Europe addresses a wide range of topics and can say a lot about current developments and policy debates. This has e.g. been demonstrated by the programme's communication activities related to COVID-19.[69] However, from an outside perspective the programme could become stronger in 'selling' its activities (e.g. of Policy Learning Platform or open events of projects), project results and publications in the light of recent developments or policy agendas. For examples more hard-hitting communication on relevant messages related to the social and economic recovery post COVID-19, the European Green Deal and Just Transition Plans, or not at least the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) would certainly give the programme more attention and demonstrate its relevance. This requires the compilation of relevant results, activities and key messages with short notice and packaging them following the KISS principle. For more long-term policy agendas this can also involve more thorough work incl. monitoring. In this context SDG working and monitoring approaches from the field of impact assessments might be of interest (see textbox).

Inspiration from "abroad" – Link to wider policy agendas

Linking to wider policy agendas may help adjusting goals and pioneering. One global policy agenda that could serve as a starting point is a link to the Sustainable Development Goals and more specifically to SDGs working and monitoring approaches. The 2019 document "Reflection Paper: Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030" tried to establish for the first time a clear link between projects and policies at EU level and in Member States (national and subnational levels) with each one of the 17 SDGs.

Overall, there is an increasing trend at EU level for monitoring and analysing the contribution of different projects and policies to the SDGs, e.g. by improving and adjusting the reporting methods and process to also analyse this impact. Examples can be seen, for instance, from Eurostat, which is

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[69] The programme showed a fast reaction to COVID-19 strengthening its digital tools. A dedicated COVID-19 page, several webinars plus the online annual event presented thematic examples relevant to the present situation. All always supported by active social media communication. The experience in online meetings allowed the programme to train the projects in how to transfer their activities to online activities in two webinars with a very high participation also from outside the projects.

developing and looking at different indicators towards this direction. Another example comes along with the EU action plan on sustainable finance[70]. The InvestEU Fund (2021-2027) contains specific legal requirements for the contribution of investment projects to sustainability objectives. The main requirements for sustainability proofing of InvestEU Fund operations are found in the InvestEU Regulation of April 2019. Such proofing is meant to minimise potential detrimental impacts of the investment projects on the climate, environment and social dimensions, while maximising the benefits generated by the project along these dimensions, as well as the resilience of the project to potential impacts deriving from them.

Calling on your ambassadors. Interreg Europe communicates at many different levels and a wide range of communication activities are actually run by projects. Still, when it comes to 'official' communication of the programme and the programme's presence at various fora and events the main focus seems to be on the joint secretariat. Project partners might still be there but not official representing Interreg Europe. This is an underexploited potential concerning the visibility of the programme. Other programmes such as ESPON or URBACT make wider use of their experts and community to actually increase their presence and visibility in the field. They may very well ask them to represent and speak for the programme on particular occasions. A similar approach can be seen in the context of EU macro-regional strategies, which hardly have any manpower and fully rely on the members of their community to represent the strategies at various occasions. All this requires a careful balancing between encouraging various players to take on responsibilities and ensuring good communication. The EU macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) has developed a toolkit for this (see textbox).

Inspiration from "abroad" – Strategic positioning of EU macro-regional strategies

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) has develop 'Let's Communicate'[71], a communication toolkit for communicating its activities to a broader audience. Among others, the tool assists in the management of social media, by being committed to the use of social media, have continuity and regularity in the usage, cooperate with others and organise a time planning and management. This communication tool has been developed so as to bring the EUSBSR key implementers community closer and make the communication of the strategy stronger. It is particularly designed to support the communication of three key EUSBSR stakeholder groups (national coordinators, policy area / horizontal action coordinators and flagships), on contents relevant to the strategy. Creating contact lists, tagging and using direct messages and tracking the audience and the usage of the channels are among the management steps.

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[70] https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance_en

[71] https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/introduction/what-why-how

Indicators. Monitoring and evaluation indicators linked to communication activities are dispersed across various activities and documents. Table 6 provides an overview on output, result and impact indicators linked to communication activities listed in the Interreg Europe 'Communication Strategy', 'Digital Strategy', 'Programme Manual' (and subsequently also the Progress Report templates for phase 1 and 2), and 'Policy Learning Platform Evaluation Report'.

The table reveals that the various documents have different understandings or use of 'output indicators' as compared to 'result indicators. For example, the number of website visitors are considered an 'output indicator' in the 'Communication Strategy', the 'Programme Manual' and the 'Policy Learning Platform Evaluation', while they are considered 'result indicators' in the 'Digital Strategy'. Although variations may be justified due to varying intervention logics, it might be worthwhile developing a coherent approach bringing together all communication related indicators in one system for the next Interreg Europe Programme.

Such a coherent approach to monitoring and evaluating communication activities across projects, Policy Learning Platform and joint secretariat would also benefit from a shared and clearly spelled out intervention logic. At present, the intervention logic justifying a particular indicator and telling how to read it, is not always easy to grasp. This is in particular the case, when not just looking into single activities but at the programme as such. A shared and clear intervention logic linked to all communication efforts of the next programme may also help to reduce the number of indicators and decide which ones are important. Furthermore, it will help to get more coherent split of indicators into output, outcome or result/impact indicators (if that is anticipated) in future.

Monitoring and evaluation of communication should, ideally, not be limited to the level of reach, but also cover the dimensions of quality, usefulness, uptake and use. This implies measuring effects also at the (communication) user side. Monitoring of these dimensions is not easy but will offer more meaningful results in the end.

Elements of indicators that facilitate evaluability are, for example, the indicator unit, a more detailed description or a measurement method to ensure comparability of indicators over time. This is especially important as measurement techniques of social media change quite often (approx. every 1-2 years), hampering the direct use of these tracking tools as information source for multiannual programmes e.g. Google analytics, Facebook insights.

Generally, the indicators addressed in the 'Communication Strategy' are a good starting point for this. Although they would benefit from (a) a clear formulation of what the actual indicator is, and (b) for each indicator a clear approach on how to establish the needed information[72].

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[72] In general, communication of an Interreg Programme is only a means to an end. It is clear that is shall help to achieve the Programme objectives and it is not the central activity of an Interreg programme. Therefore, resources are limited and – in line with that – also expectations should not be too high. However, much can be done to make the monitoring and evaluation of a communication strategy more valuable and effective than just measuring output indicators on reach. For more guidance on how to define useful communication strategies (including objectives and indicators), please see these documents: - "Communications monitoring, evaluating and learning toolkit" at https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-

Table 6 - Interreg Europe Communication Indicators

	Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
Communication Strategy	• Average number of visitors to website, per month • Number of appearances in media (project reporting)	• Awareness about Interreg Europe among potential beneficiaries[73] • Use of Interreg Europe programme tools (e.g. partner search)[74] • Satisfaction with the programme's training on implementation[75] • Awareness about Interreg Europe PLP[76] • Use of good policy practices discovered through Interreg Europe[77] • Positive impact of interregional cooperation[78]	
Digital Strategy		• Website tracking keyword rankings • Website traffic volume • Website traffic quality • Number of sessions on project pages • Number of sessions on policy pages • Number of new users to website/month • Number new subscriptions to mailing lists • Number of twitter followers • Number of twitter interactions • Number of monthly Facebook likes • Number of community members on LinkedIn	
Programme Manual & Progress Report templates for phase 1 & 2	• Number of policy instruments addressed • Number of policy learning events organised • Number of good practices identified • Number of action plans developed • Number of people with increased professional capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation activities in the field tackled by the project • Average number of sessions at the project pages per reporting period • Number of appearances in media (for example the press)	• Number of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes where measures inspired by the cooperation were implemented in the field tackled by the project. • Number of other regional policy instruments where measures inspired by the cooperation were implemented in the field tackled by the project. • Amount (EUR) of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and/ or ETC) influenced by the project in the field tackled by the project • Amount (EUR) of other funds influenced by the project in the field tackled by the project	

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downloads/odi_rapid_mel_toolkit_201801.pdf as well as "Toolkit for the evaluation of communication activities" at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-evaluation-toolkit_en.pdf

[73] questionnaire to beneficiaries, number of website sessions
[74] questionnaire to beneficiaries, number of website profiles, number of participants in events
[75] event feedback
[76] survey to ESIF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies, number and type of actors involved, number of sessions on thematic webpages
[77] survey to ESIF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies, number of secessions on project pages, number of sessions on website, number of participants in dedicated events, feedback from participants in dedicated events
[78] number of media outreach activities, number of appearances in media, points of contact activities

| Policy Learning Platform | • Number of policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP
• Number of participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP
• Number of people receiving policy advice and support through the PLP Helpdesk
• Number of registered users, also broken down per target group i.e. MA/IBs, IR-E projects, other public authorities, others
• Share of all European regions (NUTS2) register to PLP (%)
• Share of MAs/IBs of SF among the registered users (%)
• Monthly average number of page views to PLP website pages
• Monthly average number of interactions (i.e. likes, shares, comments) on social media posts PLP
• Number of page views in the Good Practices webpages
• Share of Good Practices "followed" by registered users (%)
• Number of presentations of the PLP in external (non IR-E) events
• Estimated number of participants reached through PLP presentation at external (non IR-E) events | • Share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP (%)
• Share of people satisfied with the services received from the PLP Helpdesk (%)
• Share of visitors satisfied with the online information on the PLP website pages (www.policylearning.eu) (technical note: possibility to give a smile or frown in the landing page of PLP) (%)
• Share of registered users stating that they consider the PLP as an EU reference portal for stakeholders involved in regional development in the 4TOs covered (%)
• Share of registered users with increased professional capacity due to their participation in activities of the PLP (%) | • Share of growth and jobs or ETC programmes represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%) (see also programme manual page 55)
• Amount of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and ETC) influenced by the PLP
• Share of other policy instruments represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%)
• Amount of other funds influenced by the PLP |

As social media and digital approaches will increase in importance, it might be worthwhile to strengthen social media indicators. This does not necessarily need to mean more indicators, but maybe improved monitoring systems can be helpful. As afore mentioned, it might be possible to get inspiration from Interreg Central Europe for the social media indicators.

Community outreach is already addressed through a few indicators (e.g. awareness about Interreg Europe or awareness about the Policy Learning Platform or number of Policy Learning Platform users broken down by target groups). Given the earlier reflections on the importance of the community and 'ownership', it might be worthwhile to see how to improve indicators on the community outreach in the next programming period. This might possibly go through targeted sub-segments which can be accessed via regular surveys (e.g. ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EMFF Managing Authorities, members of the European Committee of the Regions, members of the European Parliament, members of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions).

Following the same line of reasoning and reflection, the discussion on 'communities of practices', it might also be worthwhile to consider whether it is possible to monitor the community interaction encouraged or facilitated by Interreg Europe. It certainly needs some efforts to build up a useful monitoring on this. However, a possible start could be a survey question to all members of the Interreg Europe community inquiring about the level of interaction outside 'Interreg Europe contexts' with new contacts they have made via Interreg Europe.

6 Overall conclusions and recommendations for Interreg Europe

6.1 Overall conclusions and SWOT-analysis for Interreg Europe 2014-2020

This section presents our overall conclusions on the detailed results of the 2020 update evaluation that were presented in chapters 2-5.

The terms of reference for this evaluation also request that the chapter on conclusions in the final report includes a brief SWOT analysis of the current Interreg Europe programme. This SWOT analysis shall have the same structure as the final report and is envisaged as a contribution to the currently ongoing programming process of Interreg Europe 2021-2027.

Main conclusions from the effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 1)

The **effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe projects** has shown that the performance to date, both in terms of outputs and results, is considerable and largely on track. Only with regard to the projects' self-defined output and result targets that they want to achieve at the end of their implementation period, there are deviations indicating that these targets might not be fully reached. Nevertheless, the contribution of the projects' current achievements to the Interreg Europe target values for 2023 is already substantial, so it can be assumed that in most cases they will be over-achieved at the end of the programme period.

The relatively few output and result indicators that Interreg Europe 2014-2020 applies equally to all six SOs allow for an adequate and also precise monitoring of the achievements of projects and thus also of the overall performance of the programme as such. However, there are still minor weaknesses in the iDB monitoring system that cause statistical bias in some areas. These aspects should be addressed by the Joint Secretariat and also consistently remedied in the current programming period.

The **effectiveness evaluation of the Policy Learning Platform (PLP)** showed that the second pillar of Interreg Europe is gradually reaching the expected "cruising speed" in a number of its increasingly differentiated fields of activity. This diversification of services is, incidentally, one of the most defining features characterising the more recent PLP implementation phase (i.e. during year 2 and year 3).

At the same time, the evaluation has also shown a "mixed picture" for output achievement: for some indicators the 2023 target values are already over-achieved, whereas for other indicators it is clear that the final output targets will most likely not be reached at the end of the programming period.

For the PLP result achievement, however, it is difficult to make a robust concluding statement since data is so far available only for one out of the 9 existing result indicators (i.e. programme-level and "other" result indicators). This data show that over 90% of the persons having participated in different PLP events were satisfied with the content of these events. Overall, however, we regard the current result

monitoring of the PLP as a major weakness that must be addressed in the future (i.e. for the period 2021-2027).

SWOT-analysis for the effectiveness of Interreg Europe

Strenghts	Weaknesses
• The projecs' output and result achievement is considerable and largely on track. • Projects will most likely overachieve Interreg Europe output and result target values for 2023. • Adequate monitoring of project achievements (outputs / results), adapted to specific needs and particularities of Interreg Europe. • The PLP is gradually reaching the expected "cruising speed" and services, which are also more diversified, are in general well accepted. • Some PLP output indicators have already over-achieved the 2023 target values.	• Some of the projects' self-defined output and result targets might not be fully reached (lower self-performance). • The PLP will most likely not reach some of the final output target values for 2023. • For some PLP output indicators, 2023 target values will not be reached. • PLP result monitoring is weak and does not allow formulating a robust concluding statement on overall result achievement.
Opportunities	Threats
• Current approach for monitoring project achievements (outputs / results) can and should be used in the period 2021-2027. • Continuation of the now well-known PLP-services in the period 2021-2027, but with punctual adjustments and also more realisitc target values for 2029. • Possibility to profoundly review the currently inadequate PLP result monitoring approach for the period 2021-2027.	• Future Interreg Europe projects continue to define over-ambitious own target values (i.e. in 2021-2027). • Continuation of the currently inadequate PLP result monitoring in 2021-2027 and persistingly weak information about PLP-result achievement.

Main conclusions from the evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change (Task 2)

Overall, Interreg Europe's **current approach for project-level cooperation** is adequate and also conductive to reaching the stated programme objectives. In particular, the related voluntary and mandatory cooperation activities are generally perceived by projects as meaningful and useful. The approach and the related activities can be used to conceive comprehensive but project-specific policy learning processes that lead to an increase of personal, institutional / organisational and inter-organisational capacities. This learning-based capacity increase, in turn, establishes the essential pre-conditions for a largely successful implementation of the policy changes that project partners foresee in their action plans (i.e. improvement of the respectively addressed policy instruments).

Nevertheless, it also became apparent that improvements could and should be made with regard to the scope of the intended learning process (stronger anchoring in phase 2), although this only makes sense in the new programming period 2021-2027.

The evaluation has shown that not only the expected **policy improvements coming about as "impact outcomes"** are substantial (40%), but also the already achieved ones. This is important because these are contributions to the programme result that can be entirely and credibly attributed to the outputs of activities that were carried out by the 258 Interreg Europe projects. If their current volume is taken into account (i.e. in terms of improved Structural Funds instruments and EU funding influenced), it is even very likely that this type of project outcome will achieve a large part of the result target values the programme expects to reach at the end of 2023. The decisive factor for this success is that a sufficiently large number of institutions or organisations with direct responsibility for the policy instruments addressed are directly involved in the projects as partners.

Interreg Europe projects also implement a wide range of **policy improvements that are coming about as "influence outcomes".** This outcome type differs from "impact outcomes" in that it is achieved with more or less significant contributions coming from project-external factors. These external contributions originate mainly from the fact that institutions or organisations with direct responsibility for the addressed policy instruments are not directly involved as partners in the projects. Policy improvements that are "influence outcomes" can therefore not be regarded entirely as a direct contribution to the achieved policy change (i.e. the actual result of Interreg Europe), as this contribution only emerges from the also included but variable direct project effects.

Achieved "influence outcomes" are therefore classified with regard to the significance of included direct project effects (low, medium and high). This classification shows that policy improvements with medium project effects account for the majority and that all improvements with high direct project effects should be considered a credible and full contribution to the programme results. According to a cautious initial estimation, the few "influence outcomes" with high direct project effects can indeed also contribute substantially to the programme results expected for 2023.

The **Policy Learning Platform**, as the second and strategically important pillar of Interreg Europe, does not contribute to a large extent to the direct improvement of policy instruments and to an influencing of related funding. This is, incidentally, also evidenced by the above-mentioned weakness in monitoring the PLP results. However, the PLP peer reviews conducted since 2018 may have direct impacts, but their scope is minimal compared to the policy changes achieved by projects and can also not be fully assessed at present. Nevertheless, this PLP service should be retained in the future, as it also addresses a target group that is located "outside" the Interreg Europe project community.

The Interreg Europe results are indeed contributing to **the achievement of EU-wide policy goals and regional / local development objectives,** but not directly in form of an "impact outcome". This is mainly due to the fact that concrete changes in the socio-economic conditions or the environmental situation of the regions will only occur after the effective use of improved policy instruments and, moreover, after a sufficiently long period of application of these instruments. Nevertheless, it should be noted that contributions to better implementing RIS3 and more generally to promoting smart growth are strong. In addition, Interreg Europe makes clear but comparatively smaller

contributions to promoting inclusive growth and sustainable growth in the regions and cities of Europe. This somewhat lower contribution is primarily due to the fact that it mostly emerges from "influence outcomes".

When considered together, these contributions tend to influence on EU-wide territorial cohesion rather differently: one trend suggests that the already strong position of more developed regions is further strengthened (esp. for research, development and innovation), while other trends point to real opportunities that may allow less developed or transition regions to catch-up with more developed regions.

This evaluation of the policy impact of Interreg Europe was largely based on data from the monitoring system iDB. The scope of the currently available data is very good, although smaller data gaps in iDB have been found in the qualitative monitoring of achieved project results (e.g. wrong allocation of some programmes to ETC; lacking classifications of direct project effects for some "influence outcomes"). Moreover, the learning-based capacity increase of organisations is not yet captured by suitable indicators (i.e. project partner organisations; stakeholder organisations). However, these indicators should have been introduced already at the outset of Interreg Europe 2014-2020.

SWOT-analysis for Interreg Europe's impact on policy change

Strenghts	Weaknesses
• The approach for project-level cooperation is adequate and also conductive to reaching the stated programme objectives. • Projects increase personal, institutional / organisational and inter-organisational capacities. • Substantial proportion of policy improvements that are "impact outcomes" (40% direct contributions to programme result). • "Influence outcomes" also make contributions to the programme result, especially if they include high direct project effects. • Interreg Europe's contributions to RIS3 and smart growth is strong, but "only" significant for inclusive growth and sustainable growth.	• Insufficient consideration of policy-related learning processes in phase 2 (e.g. possible project activities, funding, monitoring). • High proportion of policy improvements that are "influence outcomes" (60%), due to a lack of project participation by organisation with direct responsibility for policy instruments. • Smaller data gaps in iDB for the qualitative monitoring of envisaged or achieved policy changes. • Missing indicators for capturing the learning-based capacity increase of organisations.
Opportunities	Threats
• Increasing policy impact through stronger project involvement of institutions / organisations with direct responsibility for policy instruments. • PLP peer reviews are stronger used and also better "framed" in terms of results monitoring. • Interreg Europe can further expand cooperation potentials that would allow less developed or transition regions to catch up with more developed regions.	• Future projects include only some partners with direct responsibilities for the adressed policy instruments, which reduces the (indeed existing) possibilities for achieving a high impact on policy change. • In the future, an overly strong cooperation focus on research, development and innovation might further strengthen the already stong position of more developed regions.

Main conclusions from the operational evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 3)

Summing up, the update of the operational mid-term evaluation provides a positive picture. In terms of strengths and weaknesses of the programme and external opportunities and risk following points can be highlighted.

Strengths of the programme are mainly related to the broad scope of activities and topics addressed by programme activities as well as the innovative and agile approach developed for the Policy Learning Platform.

External opportunities which can support future programme development concern the positive attitude and engagement of an extremely large community of Interreg Europe. Furthermore, the changing policy making environment incl. economy recovery post COVID-19, expected reductions of public spending in the medium-term and the need to adjust to a green and digital transition will increase the demand for policy learning. Here the lessons learned from Interreg Europe projects and the activities of the Policy Learning Platform come in handy.

Operational weaknesses of the programme concern the risks for micro-management, for overburdened staff at the joint secretariat, for turning community members into consumers of the programme rather than prosumers and the often rather humble communication. You are great, so go out and tell the world!

External threats are merely sceptical key decision makers, the medium-term risks for limited availability of regional and national co-funding and re-nationalisation tendencies following COVID-19 which side-line cooperation efforts.

SWOT-analysis for the operational dimension of Interreg Europe

Strenghts	Weaknesses
• Wide and active community. • Large thematic coverage . • Innovative approach of Policy Learning Platform.	• Risk to put community in a passive role. • Risk for micro-management. • Risk to overburden joint secretariat staff. • Too humble in the communication.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Positive attitude and engagement of community members e.g. in Policy Learning Platform. • Increasing demand for more efficient and effective regional devleopment policies and actions (read for policy learning).	• Sceptical key decision makers. • Risk for shortage of co-funding. • Reduced cooperation focus in Europe post COVID-19.

6.2   Recommendations for Interreg Europe in the period 2021-2027

This section presents our recommendations for Interreg Europe, which focus exclusively on the new programming period 2021-2027. This is mainly because, apart from a few identified and easily correctable shortcomings in the current monitoring system (i.e. "statistical bias", missing classification of some "impact outcomes" or "influence outcomes"), no major weaknesses have been found that would require decision-taking by the monitoring committee.

In relation to the results of the operational evaluation, however, no recommendations in the strict sense of the word are presented. Instead, a number of "lines of thinking" are formulated that should be thoroughly discussed between all partners involved in the programming process (i.e. discussion paths).

Thematic focus of future interregional cooperation

From the results of the effectiveness evaluation and the evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change, no recommendations can be derived regarding the possible future thematic orientation of the programme for the period 2021-2027.

This is mainly due to the fact that all of the present themes of intervention are also relevant in the future, although they are currently addressed by variable numbers of projects (esp. SO1.1). Another important and often observed fact is that even single policy changes achieved by project partners "produce" considerable contributions to the expected thematic result, which can exceed the contributions of several policy changes in other thematic fields of intervention.

General orientation of project level cooperation

For future project-level cooperation, however, several recommendations can be derived from the findings of the evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change.

Our findings on the current policy learning process at project-level, as well as many suggestions made by survey respondents, argue in favour of slightly re-organising some aspects of this process in the period 2021-2027. A more intense and structured policy learning process should be foreseen for the phase 2 of projects (i.e. if maintained in the future), in order to stronger value the capacity increase emerging from "learning-by-doing" (i.e. learning from experiences gained with practically implementing action plan measures and from conclusions that can be drawn on the actual relevance and suitability of the originally envisaged measures).

On this backdrop, it should then also be discussed whether the future monitoring of capacity increase is extended beyond the current phase 1, e.g. by applying indicators that capture personal and organisational or inter-organisational capacity increase also during the second and implementation-focussed phase of projects (see below).

Recommendation 1 - The approach for project-level cooperation in the period 2021-2027 should foresee a more intense and also structured policy learning process during the phase 2 of projects (if

maintained) and also apply suitable indicators for capturing the resulting capacity increase of persons and organisations.

Our analysis of "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes" has shown that the 258 Interreg Europe projects were generally successful with improving Structural Funds programmes and also with influencing the related funding. These improvements account for the overwhelming majority of "influence outcomes", but also hold a very significant share in the "impact outcomes". Both features somehow confirm the value of the 50% rule imposing to projects that at least half of the addressed policy instruments had to be Structural Funds instruments. However, it should also be acknowledged that projects had often to cope with substantial difficulties related to this rule (e.g. involvement of managing authorities as project partners; difficulties to achieve change if programmes were in an advanced stage of implementation etc.), or simply could not comply with it if project-relevant policy topics were not covered by existing Structural Funds programmes.

For us, therefore, the above does not provide a clear basis for suggesting whether this focus, and thus the 50% rule, should be maintained or not in the programme period 2021-2027. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that abolishing or significantly lowering this threshold will inevitably reduce the future influence of Interreg Europe on these policy instruments. If one also takes into account the great importance that the Structural Funds will continue to have for territorial development in many countries, this loss in influence could well also result in a decline in the image of Interreg Europe.

Recommendation 2 - The question of continuing the current focus on Structural Funds programmes in the period 2021-2027 through the application of the 50% rule should be discussed and decided by the Partner States, though carefully weighing up the associated advantages and disadvantages.

The analysis of "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes" has also shown that the direct project-level involvement of institutions / organisation being fully responsible for the addressed policy instruments is a crucial determinant for the overall scope of the programme's impact on policy change. However, the current shares of both outcome types in all envisaged policy improvements (i.e. 40% "impact outcomes" and 60% "influence outcomes") indicates clearly that a large number of project partners is actually not fully responsible for the addressed policy instruments.

Since the basic thoughts underlying the current notion of impact (i.e. only this part of the achieved change that can be credibly attributed to the implemented intervention) tend to be valid also in the coming programming period, this has clear implications for future project-level cooperation. It should therefore be ensured that all partners involved in future projects have direct responsibility for the policy instruments addressed. This strict rule does not prevent future projects to include other policy relevant organisations, either as a further partner from the same territory or as organisations to be involved in future regional/local stakeholder groups.

With respect to these regional/local stakeholder groups, the evaluation has also clearly shown their crucial importance for developing the policy improvement approaches that were subsequently

implemented through measures of the adopted action plans. Furthermore, it has become evident that continuous interaction with other regional / local stakeholder organisations is often also relevant for monitoring the implementation of action plan implementation during phase 2. Taking both aspects into account, the role of the stakeholder groups should be further enhanced by foreseeing regular regional / local interaction also during a future phase 2 (if maintained) and by providing projects with appropriate funding for such activities.

Recommendation 3 - *For future cooperation projects, the direct involvement as a partner of the organisation being responsible for the addressed policy instruments should be mandatory. In addition, future projects should continue their regular regional/local interaction in stakeholder groups during phase 2 (if maintained) and receive appropriate funding for this purpose.*

Monitoring of future project achievements

The monitoring approach of Interreg Europe 2014-2020 applies relatively few programme-level output and result indicators equally to all six SOs, which are also vertically linked to the project-level so that related quantitative / qualitative information can be collected from the projects' progress reports. The quantitative data and qualitative information from the programme monitoring system iDB are adequate and, for the most part, sufficiently differentiated to allow a detailed evaluation of effectiveness and impact to be carried out without difficulty.

Aside to some minor data gaps or inconsistencies that have to be eliminated, the current monitoring approach can thus also be used in the period 2021-2027. This option is worth to be considered seriously, since the new common output and result indicators listed in Annex 1 of the Commission's proposal for an ERDF/Cohesion Funds Regulation are not very suited for capturing and monitoring the specific outcomes of interventions that will be supported by Interreg Europe[79]. This situation has also not changed with the amended wording of these indicators that is included in Council working paper of spring 2019[80].

Recommendation 4 - *The Interreg Europe programme for 2021-2027 should only use programme-specific output and result indicators, preferably those from the period 2014-2020.*

The only project outcome not yet captured by the 2014-2020 indicators is the "capacity increase" of institutions or organisations that are directly involved in projects or linked to them. This increase emerges from learning processes taking place within project partner institutions / organisations (intra-

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[79] Indicators in table 1 of Annex 1 can be used by both the future ERDF programmes under the Investment for Employment and Growth goal and the Interreg programmes under the ETC goal. These indicators measure the concrete "material components" of future interventions (outputs) and also the related positive socio-economic or environmental effects that emerge in a short-term perspective (i.e. results in 1 or 2 years after an intervention). Both aspects are, however, not reflecting the core outcomes of future Interreg Europe projects (i.e. achieving policy learning, capacity improvements and policy change). The additional common output and result indicators in table 2 of Annex 1 are supposed to capture and measure cooperation-specific aspects of Interreg, but also these are also not very helpful for capturing the complexity and specificity of future interventions funded by Interreg Europe.

[80] See: Council of the European Union, Working Paper WK 6358/2019 INIT, General Secretariat, Brussels, 23 May 2019.

organisational learning) as well as between the project partners and other project-external local or regional stakeholder organisations at national, regional or local level (inter-organisational learning).

This significant gap should be closed by the Interreg Europe programme 2021-2027. Moreover, there is a strong need for introducing this improvement, since the online survey conducted for the 2020 update evaluation identified the capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations as the most important prerequisite for achieving the envisaged policy changes.

Recommendation 5 - *The Interreg Europe programme for 2021-2027 should introduce a new programme-specific indicator that captures the capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations, but preferably also those of (external) stakeholder organisations linked to the projects.*

In general, however, the new Interreg Europe programme 2021-2027 should use only a few strategic and meaningful output and result indicators that aggregate data from a number of "second-level indicators". These second-level indicators should be used for programme-internal monitoring purposes, follow the vertical chain of cause and effects in the intervention logic and cover essential aspects that the current programme already asks the projects to report either quantitatively or qualitatively. An example for a comprehensive but still reasonable set of second level output and result indicators that are vertically inter-linked is presented in the annex part of this report (**see: Annex XVII**).

Since the current Interreg Europe programme will most likely over-achieve the pre-defined output and result target values for 2023, it should be ensured that the new indicator target values for 2029 are realistically assessed in the course of the current programming process. This assessment should be based on the current experiences and by taking into account the future programme budget volume, for which, however, no precise information is yet available.

In the current Interreg Europe programme, there are clear variations between the planned and achieved outputs or results of projects for most of the analysed output and result indicators[81]. Although the issue is already recognised by the Joint Secretariat and underlying reasons are also explained[82], this aspect should nevertheless be taken into account in the future. Therefore, but only after the start of the new Interreg Europe programme and when assessing future operations, the projects' definition of own target values should be carefully examined by the Joint Secretariat in terms of their realism.

Recommendation 6 - *The Interreg Europe programme for 2021-2027 should carefully assess the new indicator target values for 2029 in the course of the programming process (based on the current experiences and by taking into account the future programme budget volume) and also ensure that future projects' own definition of target values is realistic (only after the start of the new programme).*

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[81] This is observed for the indicators "*identified good practices*", "*persons with increased capacity*", "*number of Structural Funds instruments influenced*", "*amount of Structural Funds influenced*" and "*amount of other funds influenced*".

[82] In the evaluation report of 2018 (lot 2), the JS explained that some 1st call projects have not realistically defined their initial target values and that the JS did also not check these values as rigidly as this was later done for projects from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th calls.

General orientation of the future Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is an important and innovative instrument of the programme, but still is in a sort of "role-finding process". In principle, its services are well received (although not always to the extent originally planned) and should therefore be continued. The evaluation evidence shows that especially some of the "demand driven services" are well accepted (e.g. matchmaking session, peer reviews) and that PLP peer reviews also have a potential to directly lead to policy changes.

However, the experiences made with the current provision of PLP services should be discussed during the programming process in order to explore alternative options especially regarding the scope of services that can be realistically and effectively delivered with the future means available (i.e. financial and human resources). This discussion should also consider issues relating to the future PLP management, which are raised by the operational evaluation (see below).

Recommendation 7 - *When elaborating a new "PLP mission statement" for the period 2021-2027, the actors of the programming process should carefully review the current scope of PLP services and discuss possible options (e.g. "status quo" or "widening" or "narrowing").*

Monitoring of future PLP achievements

The effectiveness evaluation has shown that the performance of the current PLP can only be partially measured (and monitored) by the extremely wide set of indicators used in the period 2014-2020.

Although the current output indicators are generally adequate, their scope should be reduced in the future by focussing only on the most relevant indicators. For the remaining set of output indicators, some adjustments should be made so that all types of target groups to be reached by future PLP services are fully captured.

Due to the Commission's new approach on result measurement in the period 2021-2027, however, many of the current result indicators are no longer appropriate. In particular the four programme level result indicators[83] should be replaced by a few and more tailor-made strategic indicators that measure and monitor core aspects of the future PLP-mission. Also the "other result indicators" (i.e. those of the PLP "Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy") should be partially adapted, so that monitoring data reflects the new reality and can also be made available at any stage of the future programme implementation process (i.e. which is currently not the case). Finally, the programming process should also define more realistic final target values for the new output and result indicators that the future PLP is actually able to achieve until 2029.

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[83] (1) Share of growth and jobs or ETC programmes represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented; (2) Amount of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and ETC) influenced by the PLP; (3) Share of other policy instruments represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented; (4) Amount of other funds influenced by the PLP.

Recommendation 8 - *The Interreg Europe programme for 2021-2027 should carry out a profound revision of its current set of indicators used for monitoring outputs and results of the PLP. Aside from reducing the overall number of indicators to be used in the future, also the content of indicators should be adapted. This is particularly relevant for result indicators.*

Discussion paths on future programme-level management and steering

There is no need to revise the programme's management structure and steering. If the programme wants to improve following possible future discussions paths might be relevant:

Recommendation 9 - Broaden and strengthen the ownership and community feeling of Interreg Europe. *Inspiration can be taken from discussions about communities of practice (see text box in section 5.1) and ways to engage community members more actively in programme tasks incl. supporting them to assume responsibility and allow for "less controlled" results.*

Recommendation 10 - Capitalising on the knowledge and diversity of the monitoring committee. *Allowing for more discussion and critical exchange at monitoring committee meetings can help to make better use of insights and networks of the members and strengthen their ownership of the programme. This requires clear facilitation and distinction between sessions for widening the discussion and for converging towards a shared decision (see text box in section 5.1).*

Recommendation 11 - Possible adaptations the use of the Technical Assistance budget. *Some of the points made in the operational evaluation may even reflect on minor changes in the use of Technical Assistance resources. This includes possible actions to increase the involvement of community members, possible activities concerning the national points of contact, changes in the involvement of the joint secretariat in the day-to-day work on the Policy Learning Platform (see below) or communication activities (see below).*

Discussion paths on future programme-support to projects

The key message concerning the programme support to projects is simply keep up the good work. Some minor suggestions of improvement have been mentioned above. If the programme wants to improve following possible future discussions paths might be relevant:

Recommendation 12 - Communication on existing tools and templates. *It seems there is still room to improve the information and increase awareness about existing tools and templates for projects.*

Recommendation 13 - Mutual learning and exchange on (administrative) tasks. *There is a huge knowledge among the community of project partners on how to master various (administrative) tools and requirements. Possibly facilitating an exchange platform between them to mutual learn from each other might help to answer various requests for support and information and strengthen the community feeling.*

Recommendation 14 - Phase 1 and 2 flexibility. *The rigid distinction between phase 1 and 2 is logical from the programme's point of view, however often seen as hindrance from the projects' point of view. Discussions about possible changes in the next programme period are ongoing.*

Recommendation 15 - Keep improving in collaboration with project partners. *The programme is evolving and changing with its context and projects. It is important that also the project management and joint secretariat stay agile and improve approaches and solution on the go. Often it may be helpful to consider doing this in collaboration with project partners (e.g. in form of a reference group), to ensure that the project perspective is well captured.*

Discussion paths on future programme support to the Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is an innovative and highly appreciated tool. Certainly, it is worthwhile to continue and even further strengthen it. The programme might want to take on board following discussions paths for further improving the delivery and management:

Recommendation 16 - Stronger community and bottom-up approach. *The Policy Learning Platform is a unique opportunity to engage community members and allow for bottom-up exchange and learning. This is a long-term investment for facilitating the emergence of communities of practices around the programme.*

Recommendation 17 - Clarity on services, roles and target groups. *Stepping back and defining for each service offered, what is the purpose and target group, incl. which part of the community has what role, will help to clarify the focus.*

Recommendation 18 - Steering through target setting. *The management and steering of the Policy Learning Platform may benefit from a shift towards parametric governance or Open Method of Coordination. This implies clear agreements on deliverables and quality standards, but freedom at implementation level.*

Discussion paths on the future Communication Strategy

Interreg Europe communicates actively and should continue doing so. The programme might want to take on board following discussions paths for further improving communication activities:

Recommendation 19 - Stronger digital dimension and more interactive community. *In future digital and social media communication will become even more active and require a stronger emphasis and resources. This concerns both the strengthening of social media communication, as well as interactive platforms where the communication among community members is facilitated. This is not just about a technical solution but requires also active management and facilitation.*

Recommendation 20 - Stronger strategic positioning. *To ensure a prosperous Interreg Europe after 2027, the strategic communication and positioning should be strengthened throughout the programme period. This involves target communication towards key decision makers as well as clear communication in relation to main policy agendas and developments.*

Recommendation 21 - You are not on your own – let your community talk on-behalf of you. *To work towards a stronger 'omnipresence' of Interreg Europe, it might be worthwhile extending the presence of various members of the community (project partners, experts, etc.) as 'ambassadors' at various events and let them communicate in the name of the programme. This may also help the requested increase presence of the programme in national events.*

Recommendation 22 - Coherent intervention logic and monitoring. *For the next programme period it might be worthwhile to bring together all communication activities in one overarching intervention logic. This could be the basis for identifying the most important communication indicators. Indicators on social media and community outreach could deserve some more attention in future.*

7 ANNEXES

7.1   Annex I – Methodological note for the evaluation of effectiveness and impacts

This methodological note briefly explains the basic concepts / terms that are used in the present evaluation report and also clarifies a number of aspects relating to the quantitative analysis of data from the programme monitoring system iDB.

Remarks relating to the effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe projects

Effectiveness is generally about "doing the right things". This means that an effectiveness evaluation examines whether appropriate actions have been taken to yield positive results and to achieve pre-defined development goals. For unveiling this, effectiveness evaluations usually analyse the measured outputs / results of interventions in order to determine how well a programme (or project) achieved its initially defined targets and objectives.

In the context of Interreg Europe, the 258 approved interregional cooperation projects (and the established Policy Learning Platform) seek to achieve with their outputs tangible changes of different policy instruments dedicated to territorial development (i.e. EU Structural Funds programmes, other national / regional local policy instruments). For this to verify, the effectiveness evaluation examined the 184 Interreg Europe projects from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls and used data from the Excel spreadsheet "Achievement Overview" that was produced at the end of June 2020 under the tools section of the programme monitoring system iDB (File status: 30/06/2020).

When using this iDB data for comparing the projects' currently achieved outputs / results to the projects' own target values for outputs / results, however, **we became aware of a "statistical bias" that exists for some of the relevant programme-level output and result indicators (see Box 1).**

Box 1 – Factors explaining a potential statistical bias in iDB for certain output/result indicators

The "*Achievement Overview*" table provides consolidated data for the indicators capturing outputs and results of projects. However, some shortcomings exist in iDB that should be considered when comparing the projects' currently achieved outputs/results to the initial target values for outputs/results in their application forms:

- Despite an initial check carried out by the Joint Secretariat (JS) during the approval stage, projects have always a tendency to be over-ambitious when setting their own target values both for output and result indicators. In case of the result indicators on influenced funding, some projects indicated extremely high (unrealistic) target values in their initial application forms that are still included in iDB at the level of the "target" column of an indicator.

- The definition of the output indicator "*number of good practices identified*" was further specified in the course of the programme implementation process. It was finally defined that this indicator should correspond to the number of good practices uploaded on the PLP good practice database, which have to be previously validated by the JS Policy Officers. However, projects from the 1st call were not aware of this demanding definition and have often set out more ambitious target values for identified good practices at the outset. In some cases, this change of definition may now lead to an "involuntary" under-performance of projects.

- In case of the result indicator "*number of policy instruments addressed*", the aggregated values for the projects' own targets (i.e. programme-wide and SO-level) are extracted from the initial project application forms. However, these target values do not take into consideration that projects can address an influence additional policy instruments in the course of their implementation process. These additional results are captured by the progress report and shown in iDB by a letter attached to the number of the improved instrument (e.g. "1b"). In reality, the number of policy instruments finally addressed by a project can therefore often be higher than the initial project target value indicated in the iDB statistics table. This means that a comparison between the number of "actually addressed instruments" and the number of "initially addressed instruments" can be biased. This also means that the statistics do not always precisely reflect the reality of a project. One example is a project partner who initially planned to address a Structural Funds programme but

The evaluators discovered **another issue in the Interreg Europe indicator and reporting system that may lead to confusion.** For the result indicator *Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced*, the Interreg Europe programme document sets out relative target values at SO-level that shall be reached at the end of 2023 (i.e. "*Share of Growth & Jobs and ETC programmes where measures inspired by INTERREG EUROPE were implemented*", with the measurement unit "*% of all Growth & Jobs and ETC programmes*").

For using project-level data from iDB, these relative targets had to be converted into absolute values. The evaluators have done this by using the general reference value originally assumed by Interreg Europe (i.e. 322 Structural Funds programmes in total) and by calculating absolute values for each SO-level share: 8% for SO 1.1 = 26 programmes; 25% for SO 1.2 = 81 programmes; 33% for SO 2.1 and SO 3.1 = 106 programmes; 16% for SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 = 52 programmes.

However, the Annual Implementation Report 2019 (AIR2019) mentions for the first time a general reference value of 382 Structural Funds programmes in Europe (ERDF & ESF mainstream and ETC cross-border and transnational) that strongly differs from the originally applied reference value of 322 programmes. As the Joint Secretariat could not explain where this value comes from, a written request was sent to DG REGIO. From the received answer, it turned out that the AIR2019 value was wrong and also that the initial reference value is outdated in the meanwhile. According to DG REGIO, a total of 376 Structural Funds programmes exist in June 2020: 300 Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes (ERDF, CF, ESF) and 76 ETC programmes (ERDF: cross-border, transnational and interregional, including Interreg Europe), not including IPA CBC and ENI CBC programmes.

Considering that the four interregional programmes should not be counted when updating the Interreg Europe result indicator baseline value, **the new general reference value would therefore be 372 programmes.** Accordingly, the **new rounded absolute values linked to the still valid SO-level shares are as follows:**

- **8% for SO 1.1 = 30 programmes;**
- **25% for SO 1.2 = 93 programmes;**
- **33% for SO 2.1 and SO 3.1 = 123 programmes each;**
- **16% for SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 = 60 programmes each.**

The new **cumulative result target value** for all SOs **is therefore 489 Structural Funds programmes** to be influenced until the end of 2023.

Unfortunately, the discovered inconsistency is not favourable for the programme's performance in relation to the 2023 target values since the latter have increased and thus cause a slightly lower result contribution level for the current achievements under this indicator.

Remarks relating to the comprehensive evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change

In the programming period 2014 – 2020, the meanings of "impact" and "result" as well as the places of both concepts within the overall intervention logic have clearly changed if compared to the previous period 2007-2013. To clarify the basic causality relations within the changed intervention logic, its main "components" are again briefly explained:

- **Outputs** are still the direct products and services emerging from the completion of project activities or programme interventions and are intended to contribute to results.

- **Results** are the specific dimensions of well-being and progress for people that motivate policy action and that are to be changed with the contribution of the designed programme interventions. The "intended result" is the desired change or a desired situation that should be arrived at in the entire programme area. The "actual result" is the change (or difference) between the situation before and after a public intervention that can be observed in the entire programme area. However, this change is not equal to the effect of a public intervention and usually comes about in form of a causal package: it is the product of contributions from programme interventions and from other factors (i.e. developments that take place beyond and beside the interventions under observation), as well as from cross-relations amongst interventions and other factors.

- **Impacts** are only those contributions (or direct effects) to the observable change that can be credibly attributed to the achieved outputs of programme interventions. In case of Interreg Europe, impact is thus the direct effect on policy change that emerges from the outputs of the two main types of programme intervention supported, i.e. the interregional cooperation projects and the established Policy Learning Platform (PLP).

An evaluation of the impact of Interreg Europe is thus mainly about better understanding these direct effects the supported programme interventions have on policy change, but also on bringing to the fore the contributions that "other factors" are making to the observed policy change (i.e. by separating or disentangling these effects from contributions that other external factors are making to policy change).

For this to be achieved, the 2018 mid-term evaluation has elaborated an overall Theory of Change (ToC) for Interreg Europe that is now used for analysing stepwise the different sequences of the shown "causal chain". Due to the general context outlined above and the specific focus of the evaluation of impacts, the analysis focuses on two types of outcomes[84] that appear repeatedly in the report:

- **Impact outcomes** depict all those constellations where policy change (intended or actual) can be credibly and solely attributed to the outputs of activities (planned or already completed) of interregional cooperation projects and of the PLP.

- **Influence outcomes** depict all those constellations where policy change (intended or actual) is achieved by direct effects from projects (or the PLP) and also by contributions from other project-external actors or influencing factors.

Data from iDB that is aggregated at the project level (i.e. data in the Excel spreadsheet "*Achievement Overview*") cannot be used for the evaluation of Interreg Europe's impact on policy change, since an improvement of policy instruments is achieved very differently within projects: some project partners achieve policy change as "impact outcome", while other partners of the same project achieve policy change as "influence outcome".

In order to determine the magnitude of "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes" within the 258 approved Interreg Europe projects, a database with two sub-sections covering both outcome types has

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[84] Outcome is used here as a summative term covering short and medium-term effects (e.g. direct effects of interventions, effects of other exogenous factors) that occur during different implementation stages of an intervention or even after the achievement of an intervention's objective.

been established for the 2020 update evaluation. This database brings together information from two iDB Excel files:

- Qualitative and quantitative information from the Excel file "*Policy Instrument Results*" was used for covering the envisaged and already achieved improvements of policy instruments under the 184 Interreg Europe from the first three calls. The included policy improvements were then allocated either to the database section on "impact outcomes" or on "influence outcomes". The decisive allocation criterion used was the fact whether a project partner organisation is directly in charge of the addressed policy instrument ("impact outcome") or not ("influence outcome").

- As the afore-mentioned Excel file only includes very little information on the envisaged policy improvements of 4th call projects, we also used the iDB Excel file "*Overview Policy Instruments*". After filtering the approved 4th call projects, the relevant policy improvements were again allocated to the two database sections in accordance with the above-explained approach.

For each of the two types of outcomes, the database thus makes it possible to depict both the overall scope of the expected policy change and the policy change already achieved.

When subsequently using this database, however, we noticed **a few inconsistencies and date gaps** that concern both the envisaged / achieved "impact outcomes" and the envisaged / achieved influence outcomes achieved (**see: Box 2**).

Box 2 – Minor inconsistencies and data gaps in iDB for "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes"

For both outcome types, iDB includes a few inconsistencies with regard to the classification of Structural Funds and ETC programmes: some ETC programmes are not marked as Structural Funds instruments, while several regional/national ERDF programmes are marked as ETC programmes.

In case of achieved "impact outcomes", no classifications for "type of improvement" were elaborated in iDB for a total of 5 policy improvements. This includes

- 3 policy improvements under SO3.1 (i.e. BIO4ECO, project partner from Romania; BIO4ECO, project partner from Finland; SET-UP, project partner from the UK),
- one policy improvement under SO4.1 (i.e. HERICOAST, project partner from Italy),
- one policy improvement under SO4.2 (ECOWASTE4FOOD, project partner from Finland).

In case of achieved "influence outcomes", no classifications for "type of improvement" and for "direct project effects" were elaborated in iDB for a total of 14 policy improvements. This includes

- one policy improvement under SO1.2 (RESET, project partner from Germany),
- 4 policy improvements under SO1.2 (i.e. ISLANDS OF INNOVATION, project partner from Denmark; OSIRIS, project partner from Greece; MANUMIX, project partner from Italy; NICHE, for project partner from Estonia),
- 3 policy improvements under SO2.1 (i.e. INTRA, project partner from Italy; RURAL GROWTH, project partner from Spain; INSIDE OUT EU, project partner from Sweden),
- 4 policy improvements under SO3.1 (OptiTrans, project partner from Spain; BIO4ECO, two times for project partner from Bulgaria; REGIO-MOB, project partner from Poland),
- 2 policy improvement under SO4.2 (CircE, project partner from the UK; ECOWASTE4FOOD, project partner from Spain).

Furthermore, no classification for "direct project effects" was elaborated in iDB for one policy improvement under SO4.1 (IMPACT, project partner from Lithuania).

7.2 Annex II – Overview of tasks, analytical activities and evaluation questions

Tasks and analytical activities of the 2020 update evaluation	Evaluation questions or other requirements from the Terms of Reference for the 2020 update evaluation
Task 1: Effectiveness evaluation of Interreg Europe	
Analysis of the current performance of projects	• To which extent the projects contribute to the specific objective of the programme?
Analysis of the current performance of the PLP	• Do the services implemented so far by the Platform contribute to reach the programme's objectives?
Task 2: Comprehensive evaluation of the impact of Interreg Europe	
Analysis of the establishment of necessary preconditions at project level for achieving policy change	• Are the new programme requirements for projects (i.e. stakeholder group, action plans) relevant and sufficient to contribute to achieving the projects' objectives? • To which extent the increased capacity of people and organisations leads to a policy change, in particular to influencing the policy instruments addressed by the projects? • Is there any possibility to further define / categorize the notion of increased capacity?
Analysis of the significance of "impact outcomes" and "influence outcomes" within the overall policy change achieved by projects	• Does the programme influence the implementation of policies and programmes for regional development (Growth and Jobs and ETC programmes) through exchange of experience and policy learning among actors of regional relevance? If yes, how?
Analysis of the PLP's likely impact on policy change	• To which extent the Platform contributes to the increased capacity of its beneficiaries?
Analysis of the projects' contribution to EU-wide and country-level development goals	• To which extent the programme contributes to achieving the EU 2020 strategy? • To which extent the programme contributes to territorial cohesion and reducing disparities? • To which extent the programme contributes to the national and regional Smart Specialisation Strategies of the programme Partner States?
Overall conclusion and elaboration of recommendations for the current period (2014-2020) and for the future programming period 2021-2027	• What are the success factors that contribute to achieving the programme's objectives? And what are the barriers? What are the recommendations for improving the results of the programme? • For the current programme, the evaluators should investigate whether any measures can still be envisaged for increasing the impact of the running operations. • The evaluators should provide a series of recommendations in relation to the strategy of a future programme. Recommendations could for instance be related to the thematic scope of the programme, the core features of the projects, the nature of the activities supported. Article 6 of the ToR requires that the final report also includes in its overall conclusions a brief SWOT analysis of the current Interreg Europe programme in order to contribute to the 2021-2027 programming process. This SWOT analysis shall have the same structure as the final report.

Task 3: Operational evaluation of Interreg Europe	
Information gathering for updating the operational mid-term evaluation (i.e. study of documents and analysis of other EU programmes, phone interview and online surveying, focus group on communication). Overall conclusion and elaboration of recommendations for the future programming period 2021-2027	**Programme management and steering:** • Should the management structure be revised? • Should the programme steering be revised? • Should the TA resources be used differently?
	Programme support to operations (general): • Should the overall programme support to applicants and beneficiaries be revised?
	Programme support to projects: • Should the supporting tools for project generation (e.g. webinars, online self-assessment tool, partner search tool, project idea feedback, and national info days in Partner States) be continued? • Is there any way to improve the project assessment? • Should the supporting tools for project implementation (e.g. reporting, mid-term review) be continued? • Should the rules and procedures for programme beneficiaries be further simplified, taking into account the regulatory framework?
	Programme support to the PLP: • Should the service provided by the Platform be continued, adapted, improved? If yes, how? • Should the way the Platform is integrated in the programme (i.e. externalisation to sub-contractors) be revised? If yes, which other model can be envisaged (inspiration from other programmes such as URBACT may be taken into consideration)?
	Programme communication strategy: • Should the programme communication strategy be approached differently? • Should the resources to the communication mix (use of online tools, events and meetings, approach to public and media relations) be adapted? Should other tools be added to the mix? • Should the programme/ project/ Platform communication indicators change?
	Article 6 of the ToR requires that the final report also includes in its overall conclusions a brief SWOT analysis of the current Interreg Europe programme in order to contribute to the 2021-2027 programming process. This SWOT analysis shall have the same structure as the final report.

7.3   Annex III – Output achievement of the 184 projects from the first three calls (Status: 30 June 2020)

Indicator	Performance measure (*)	Total, all SOs	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2
Outputs achieved by the 184 projects from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd calls								
No. of Policy Learning Events organised	**Achieved**	**8.630**	**457**	**2.134**	**2.424**	**1.834**	**1.072**	**709**
	Target value of projects	10.229	511	2.202	3.013	2.199	1.335	969
	% of achieved in project target	84,37%	89,43%	96,91%	80,45%	83,40%	80,30%	73,17%
No. of Good Practices identified	**Achieved**	**2.715**	**126**	**622**	**803**	**563**	**268**	**333**
	Target value of projects	4.688	205	1.003	1.211	1.142	489	638
	% of achieved in project target	57,91%	61,46%	62,01%	66,31%	49,30%	54,81%	52,19%
Outputs achieved by the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls having finalised their phase 1 (**)								
No. of people with increased professional capacity	**Achieved**	**10.383**	**274**	**2.689**	**2.392**	**3.188**	**960**	**880**
	Target value of projects	15.704	881	3.853	3.712	4.048	1.665	1.545
	% of achieved in project target	66,12%	31,10%	69,79%	64,44%	78,75%	57,66%	56,96%
	Target value for 2023	12.000	1.000	2.000	3.000	3.000	1.500	1.500
	% of achieved in 2023 target	86,53%	27,4%	134,45%	79,73%	106,27%	64,00%	58,67%
No. of Action Plans developed	**Achieved**	**744**	**28**	**216**	**199**	**169**	**70**	**62**
	Target value of projects	881	47	236	229	205	88	76
	% of achieved in project target	84,45%	59,57%	91,53%	86,90%	82,44%	79,55%	81,58%
	Target value for 2023	910	76	144	230	230	115	115
	% of achieved in 2023 target	81,76%	36,84%	150,00%	86,52%	73,48%	60,87%	53,91%

(*) Target values for 2023 were only defined for the 2 output indicators "No. of people with increased professional capacity" and "No. of Action Plans developed".
(**) For the two indicators, iDB-data of end of June 2020 does not yet include the "achieved outputs" of 20 projects from the 2nd call because their progress reports are currently checked and validated by the Joint Secretariat.

7.4 Annex IV – Result achievement of the 184 projects from the first three calls (Status: 30 June 2020)

Indicator	Performance measure (*) (**)	Total, all SOs	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2
No. of Structural Funds instruments influenced	**Achieved**	**225**	**14**	**74**	**56**	**47**	**14**	**20**
	Target value of projects	1.007	59	256	289	206	111	86
	% of achieved in project target	22,34%	23,73%	28,91%	19,38%	22,82%	12,61%	23,26%
	Target value for 2023 (***)	489	30	93	123	123	60	60
	% of achieved in 2023 target	46,01%	46,67%	79,57%	45,53%	38,21%	23,33%	33,33%
Amount of Structural Funds influenced, in EUR	**Achieved**	**438.803.320**	**11.090.881**	**69.530.626**	**93.422.879**	**214.683.543**	**23.250.565**	**26.824.826**
	Target value of projects	5.201.066.231	160.052.698	1.822.738.995	1.583.448.301	1.078.279.465	349.176.772	207.370.000
	% of achieved in project target	8,44%	6,93%	3,81%	5,90%	19,91%	6,66%	12,94%
	Target value for 2023	768.000.000	48.000.000	144.000.000	192.000.000	192.000.000	96.000.000	96.000.000
	% of achieved in 2023 target	57,14%	23,11%	48,29%	48,66%	111,81%	24,22%	27,94%
No. of other instruments influenced	**Achieved**	**134**	**2**	**24**	**29**	**20**	**29**	**30**
	Target value of projects	246	8	34	56	68	50	30
	% of achieved in project target	54,47%	25,00%	70,59%	51,79%	29,41%	58,00%	100%
Amount of other Funds influenced, in EUR	**Achieved**	**92.945.363**	**0**	**12.080.236**	**6.974.477**	**68.222.333**	**1.339.119**	**4.329.198**
	Target value of projects	613.843.451	45.200.000	155.066.000	74.176.851	235.733.600	61.217.000	42.450.000
	% of achieved in project target	15,14%	0,00%	7,79%	9,40%	28,94%	2,19%	10,20%

(*) Target values for 2023 were only defined for the 2 result indicators "No. of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced" and "Amount of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC funding influenced".

(**) A total of 62 projects have not yet reported any improvement of Structural Funds instruments or other policy instruments. These are 4 projects from the 1st call (i.e. *HELIUM, INNOGROW, Social Green* and *SPEED UP*), 14 projects from the 2nd call and 44 projects from the 3rd call.

(***) For this result indicator, the Interreg Europe programme document sets out relative target values (i.e. % of all Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced) that are related to the updated overall reference base of 372 programmes. The programme defined specific percentages for each SO, resulting in different absolute SO target values: 8% for SO1.1 = 30 programmes; 25% for SO1.2 = 93 programmes; 33% for SO2.1 and SO3.1 = 123 programmes each; 16% for SO4.1 and SO4.2 = 60 programmes each. The cumulative result target value for all SOs is therefore 489 Structural Funds programmes to be influenced until the end of 2023 (see also Annex I "Methodological Note").

7.5 Annex V – Monitoring data for PLP output achievement (Status: end of March 2019)

Indicator	Target value for 2023	Cumulative outputs for years 1 + 2 (target value achievement ratio)	Outputs for year 1	Outputs for year 2		
				Total	Semester 1 25/1/2018 to 24/7/2018	Semester 2 25/7/2018 to 31/3/2019
I. Pre-defined output indicators at programme level						
Share of all European regions (NUTS 2) registered to PLP (%), with 290 NUTS 2 regions existing in total	ca. 17% or 50 regions	96.2% or 279 regions	81% or 235 regions	N/A	94.8% or 275 regions	96.2% or 279 regions
Number of policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP (*)	406	31 (7.6%)	6 (4 TW, 2 B2B)	25 (7 TW, 9 WEB, 1 AE, 6 PMMS, 2 PER)	3 TW, 3 WEB,	4 TW, 6 WEB, 1 AE, 6 PMMS, 2 PER
II. Other output indicators related to policy learning (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)						
Number of participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP	7.500	1,232 (16.4%)	470	762	182	580
Number of people receiving policy advice and support through the PLP Helpdesk	1.120	37 (3.3%)	10	27	7	20
III. Other output indicators related to communication (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)						
Number of registered users, also broken down per target group i.e. MA/IBs, IR-E projects, other public authorities, others	10,000	6,086 (60.9%)	1.372	N/A	4,374	6,086
Share of MA/IBs of SF among the registered users (%)	10% (70%)	19,89%	22%	N/A	21,51% (or 941 MAs)	19,89% (or 1,211 MAs)
Monthly average number of page views to PLP website pages	500	16,457	1,800	N/A	14,889	16,457
Monthly average number of interactions (i.e. likes, shares, comments) on social media posts about PLP	100	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of views in the Good Practices webpages	10,000	9,362 (93.62%)	N/A	N/A	8,419	9,362
Share of Good Practices "followed" by registered users (%)	10%	46.7%	N/A	N/A	62.3%	46.7%
Number of presentations of the PLP in external (non IR-E) events	280	26 (9.3%)	13	14 (**)	4	10
Estimated number of participants reached through PLP presentation at external (non IR-E) events	14,000	3,917 (28%)	2,500	1,417	570	767

(*) TW = thematic workshops; B2B = back-to-back policy learning events; WEB = Webinars; AE = Annual event; PMMS = Policy matchmaking sessions; PER = Peer reviews

(**) The number also includes the participation of the TO1 thematic experts in the S3 partnership workshop under the TO1(a) R&I infrastructure and capacities investment priority

7.6 Annex VI – Monitoring data for PLP result achievement (Status: end of March 2019)

Indicator	Target value for 2023	Cumulative results for years 1 + 2	Results for year 1	Results for year 2
I. Pre-defined result indicators at programme level (see: Programme Manual)				
Share of growth and jobs or ETC programmes represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%)	10%	0	N/A	N/A
Amount of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and ETC) influenced by the PLP	35 billion EUR (from 350 billion)	0	N/A	N/A
Share of other policy instruments represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%)	10%	0	N/A	N/A
Amount of other funds influenced by the PLP	20 billion EUR	0	N/A	N/A
II. Other result indicators (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)				
Share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP (%)	80%	93.3%	100% (*)	93.3% (**)
Share of people satisfied with the services received from the PLP Helpdesk (%)	80%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Share of visitors satisfied with the online information on the PLP website pages www.policylearning.eu (%)	80%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Share of registered users stating that they consider the PLP as an EU reference portal for stakeholders involved in regional development in the 4TOs covered (%)	75%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Share of registered users with increased professional capacity due to their participation in activities of the PLP (%)	60%	N/A	N/A	N/A

(*) Share in all questionnaires submitted at already organised PLP policy learning events.

(**) For calculating the share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (thematic workshops and webinars) organised by the Policy Learning Platform, the following question of post-event surveys has been regarded: „Did the event meet your expectations?", with the reply options "Yes" or "No". The reported value of 93.3% represents the aggregated satisfaction rate for the 7 thematic workshops organised during Y2 as well as 6 webinars organised during the 2nd semester of Y2. The GoToWebinar tool used to extract survey results for the webinars does not allow extracting data older than 1 year. Thus, it was not possible to obtain data for the 3 webinars organised during the 1st semester of Y2.

7.7   Annex VII – Participants' feedback on selected PLP policy learning events

Figure 1 – Feedback of 64 participants at 7 workshops organised in year 2 (total number of participants: 229 persons)

FEEDBACK FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS
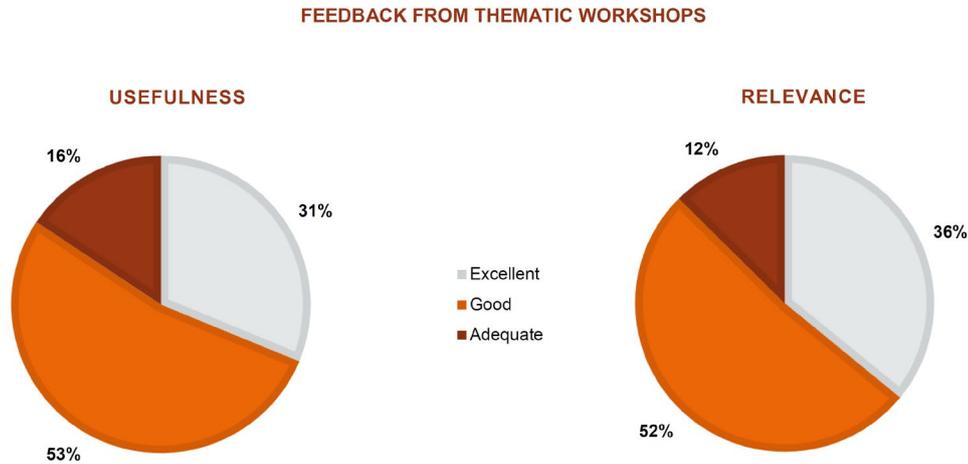
Source: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, p.13

Figure 2 – Feedback of 130 participants at 6 webinars organised in the 2nd semester of year 2 (total number of participants: 234 persons)

FEEDBACK FROM WEBINARS
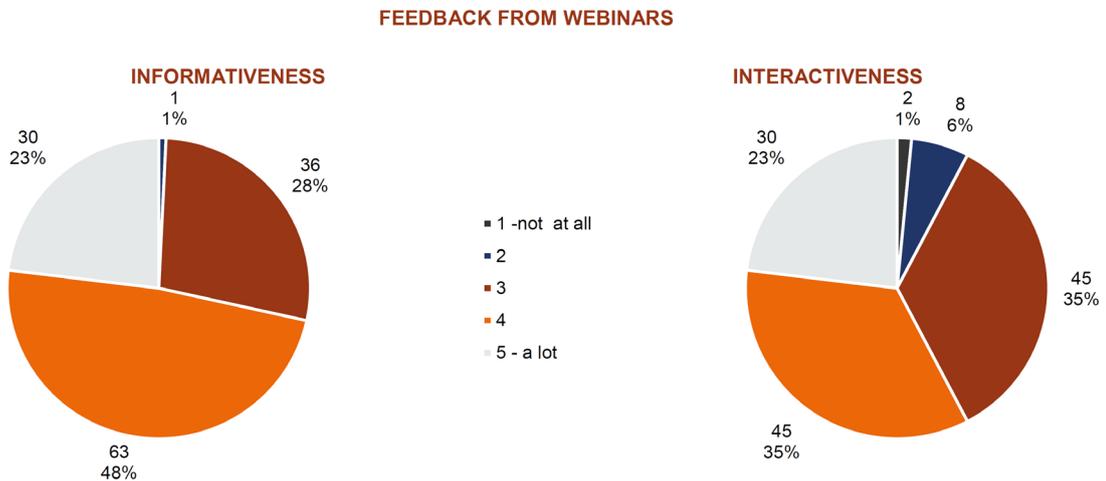
Source: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, April 2019, p. 17

7.8 Annex VIII – Overview of "mini-case studies" on projects and policy improvements, by SO

SOs	19 projects with finalised phase 2	18 policy improvements achieved as "impact outcomes"		18 policy improvements achieved as "influence outcomes"		16 policy improvements inducing socio-economic or environmental changes in territories covered by projects		
	Project	Project	Lead / project partner & country	Project & level of contribution	Lead / project partner & country	Project	Lead / project partner & country	Type of outcome & level of contribution
SO 1.1	SmartPilots	BRIDGES	3-PP (PL)	BRIDGES (medium)	6-PP (SI)	RESET	8-PP (PT)	influence outcome (no level)
	-	RESET	3-PP (PL)	RESET (no level)	8-PP (PT)	-	-	-
	-	Urban M	6-PP (HR)	SmartPilots (medium)	1-LP, 2-PP (BE)	-	-	-
SO 1.2	NICHE	ERUDITE	5-PP (SK)	NICHE (low)	5-PP (EE)	ERUDITE	5-PP (SI)	impact outcome
	ClusterS3	NMP-REG	3-PP, 4-PP (PT)	INKREASE (high)	5-PP (AT)	NMP-REG	3-PP (PT)	impact outcome
	P2L2	OSIRIS	2-PP (FI)	InnoBridge (medium)	7-PP (BG)	InnoBridge	7-PP, 8-PP (BG)	influence outcome (medium)
	ERUDITE	-	-	-	-	ecoRIS3	2-PP (IE)	influence outcome (medium)
	HoCare	-	-	-	-	ELISE	5-PP (PL)	impact outcome
	RATIO	-	-	-	-	ESSPO	7-PP (EE)	influence outcome (medium)
	S34GROWTH	-	-	-	-	InnoBridge	4-PP (HU)	influence outcome (medium)
SO 2.1	iEER;	ATM for SMEs	9-PP (PL)	SOCENT SPAs (low)	4-PP (FI)	ATM for SMEs	9-PP (PL)	impact outcome
	SME ORGANICS	Destination SMEs	5-PP (FI)	SME ORGANICS (medium)	3-PP (FR)	EIS	6-PP (IT)	impact outcome
	-	SIE	2-PP (IT)	Design 4 Innovation (high)	5-PP (MT)	INTRA	6-PP (IT)	no outcome allocation existing
	-	-	-	-	-	SME ORGANICS	1-PP, 2-PP (ES)	influence outcome (medium)
SO 3.1	ZEROCO2	CISMOB	1-LP (PT)	SMART-MR (low)	1-LP, 2-PP (SI)	REBUS	1-LP (IT)	influence outcome (medium)
	FINERPOL	ENERSELVES	3-PP (PL)	PASSAGE (medium)	11-PP (DK)	LAST MILE	3-PP (SK)	influence outcome (medium)
	PASSAGE	RESOLVE	4-PP (UK)	PASSAGE (high)	1-LP (FR), 2-PP (UK)	-	-	-
	REGIO-MOB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	CISMOB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SO 4.1	IMPACT	Night Light	7-PP (IT)	Night Light (high)	4-PP (LU)	Green Pilgrimage	4-PP (IT)	impact outcome
	CHRISTA	PERFECT	8-PP (IT)	CD-ETA (medium)	3-PP (EL)	BID-REX	1-LP, 2-PP (ES)	influence outcome (low)

	-	SHARE	2-PP (ES)	IMPACT (high)	3-PP (LT)	-	-	-
SO 4.2	RETRACE	BIOREGIO	1-LP, 2-PP (FI)	BIOREGIO (low)	7-PP (RO)	-	-	-
	CESME	INTHERWASTE	6-PP (EE)	CESME (medium)	9-LP, 10-PP (EL)	-	-	-
	-	RETRACE	1-LP, 2-PP (IT)	COCOON (high)	8-PP (ES)	-	-	-

7.9 Annex IX – Analysis of the task 2 online survey among project partners

The 2020 update evaluation of Interreg Europe conducted an online survey for task 2 that collected information for the same questions already raised by the online survey conducted for the 2018 mid-term evaluation (i.e. lot 2). These questions explored two different aspects: (1) the relevance of Interreg Europe requirements for project-level cooperation[85] and (2) the causal relationship between the project-level policy learning process and the resulting capacity increase of individuals and/or organisations.

The task 2 online survey ran from 12 March until 10 April 2020 and also included additional questions for the operational evaluation of Interreg Europe (Task 3), for which the received answers are analysed in **Annex XVI** of the present report.

Response rate of the online survey

The task 2 survey addressed lead partners and partners who participate in the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls as well as in 10 projects from the 3rd call that already have a well-advanced implementation status (i.e. 140 projects in total).

The survey collected answers from 134 projects, of which 119 answers came from project lead partners (response rate of 85%) and 257 answers from project partners (response rate of 25.4%). The response rates differ slightly by SO (see figure below), but without major differences between the respective shares for lead partners and project partners. Not all respondents replied to each question, wherefore the response rates per question are mentioned under the related graphs (n=xx).

Number of project lead partners and project partners by SO and the overall response rate per SO
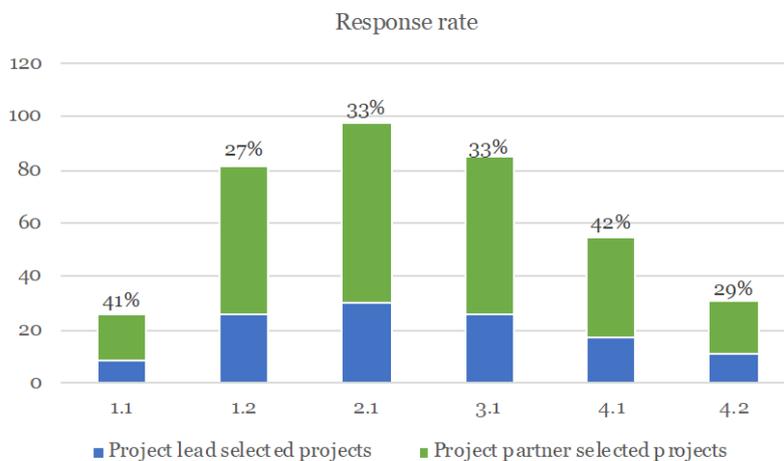
Cross-analysis of survey data for categorising the notion of "increased capacity"

For analysing the causal relationship between the project-level policy learning process and the resulting capacity increase of individuals and/or organisations, the survey data on types of foreseen policy improvements and on levels of learning required for policy improvements had to be further processed (see box below).

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[85] Relevance (1) of an interaction with regional / local stakeholder groups, (2) of an elaboration of action plans, (3) of a monitoring the action plan implementation during phase 2 and (4) of an optional implementation of pilot actions.

This data processing was needed, as respondents previously indicated their planned policy improvements through selecting either a single policy improvement type or a combination of types (multiple choices) and also assessed the importance of learning levels only in general terms.

Through that processing, survey information about the importance / intensity of learning under each approach for policy improvement became comparable, which also allowed establishing a direct link to the capacity increase of individuals and/or organisations.

Box – Data processing approach adopted for ensuring interrelation and comparability of survey information

In a **first step,** weighting levels with a corresponding numeric value were defined for the importance of learning: these are "very important" (value: 4), "important to some extent" (value: 3), "rather not important" (value: 2) and finally "not important at all" (value: 1). Then, a total value was calculated for each improvement type (or combination of improvement types) and the respectively required learning level. This can be illustrated by an example:

- 14 respondents indicated to only foresee a "change in the management of policy instruments (type 2 policy improvement) in their action plan.
- From these 14 respondents, 13 assessed organisational learning as "very important" and 1 respondent indicated organisational learning as "important to some extent".
- According to the above weighing, the combination of policy improvement type and learning level reaches a total value of importance at 55 (= 13 x 4 + 1 x 3).

Subsequently, for making these total values of importance comparable across the different types of policy improvements, an average has been calculated by type of policy improvement (or combination of improvement types). This was done by dividing the total value of learning importance by the total number of respondents only foreseeing type 2 in their action plans. By referring again to the above mentioned example, this results in the following:

- The average importance of learning for type 2 is at 3.93 (i.e. 55 /14).

Lastly, a scaling at two levels has been developed for grouping the calculated average values and achieving a more simplified presentation of the result: "rather important" (+) than "very important" (++). By referring again to the above mentioned example, this results in the following:

- An average importance of learning at 3.93 would then correspond to "very important" (++).

(1) The relevance of Interreg Europe requirements for project-level cooperation

This section analyses the answers that respondents have given to survey questions exploring the relevance of Interreg Europe requirements for project-level cooperation.

The setting up of regional / local stakeholder groups (phase 1)

Overall, 77% of the survey respondents considered continuous interaction with regional / local organisations in the established stakeholder groups crucial to achieving improvements of the respectively addressed policy instruments. Only 2 respondents indicated that their involvement was not relevant (i.e. one lead partner from a project under SO1.2; one partner from a project under SO4.1).

Small differences in the perception of relevance can be observed between project partners and project lead partners. Project lead partners assess the involvement more often as fully relevant (80%) than project partners (76%).

Respondents specify that the relevance of interaction with local and regional stakeholders depends among others on:

- The type of policy instruments addressed;
- The willingness of local and regional players to get involved in the project (i.e. they need to see an added value);
- The scope of stakeholders involved in the project, as high numbers sometimes challenge the effectiveness of meetings;
- The capacities of local partners and with that with that their potentials to become engaged into the project.

Slight differences also exist between **the patterns of response at SO-level (see: Figure 1),** but the share of respondents indicating full relevance is in most cases clearly or largely above 70%. Respondents from SO4.2 projects assess the involvement of local and regional stakeholders as most relevant, followed by respondents from projects under SO3.1, SO4.1, SO2.1 and SO1.1. Only in case of SO1.2, a relatively important share of judgements on partial relevance is observed (around 34%).

When compared to the 2018 survey results, the new pattern shows a better appreciation of local and regional stakeholder involvement among SO4.2 projects and a lower appreciation among SO1.2 and SO2.1 projects. Under the other SOs, the respondents' judgement remained more or less the same.

Figure 1 - Relevance of interaction with regional / local stakeholder groups, by SO
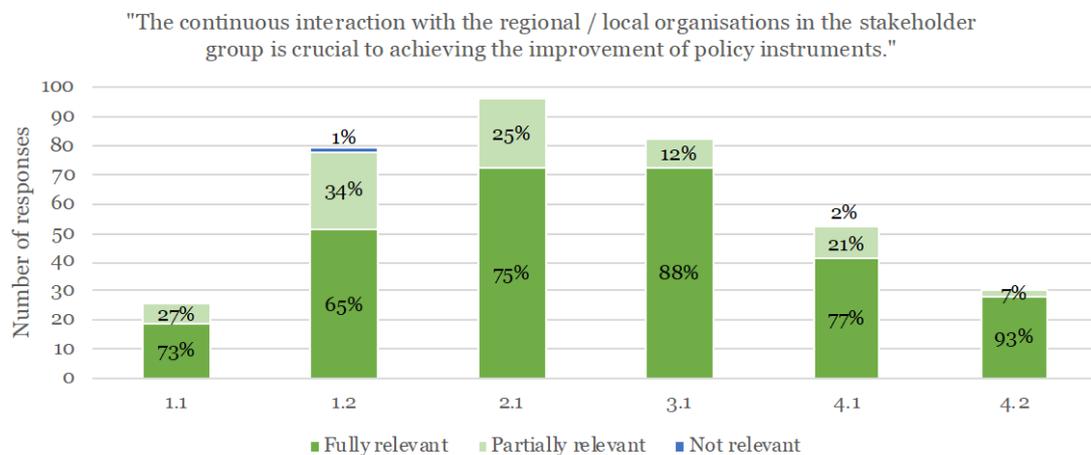
Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=366)

Elaboration of action plans during phase 1

Overall, 67% of the respondents assessed the mandatory elaboration of action plans as being fully relevant for capitalising on lessons learnt from the exchange of experience process. Most of the remaining respondents considered action planning as partially relevant.

Project lead partners and project partners assess the relevance of action plan elaboration similarly. 64% of the project lead partners assess the elaboration as fully relevant against 65% of the project partners.

36% of the project lead partners assess the elaboration of the action plan as partially relevant against 31% of the project partners.

However, 12 respondents indicated that action plan elaboration was not relevant for them (i.e. one project lead partner and 11 project partners). Negative judgements exist under nearly all SOs, but the highest numbers are observed in case of SO1.2.

Respondents stating partial relevance or non-relevance of action plan elaboration explain their judgements by the fact that the relation between the exchange of experience lessons and the action plan is not always evident or that an implementation of the actions is not guaranteed and depends on political support. Further issues were that only soft actions could be identified and that it is difficult to address policy instruments that are already being implemented.

Some differences can be observed between the patterns of response **at the SO-level (see: Figure 2),** as positive judgements on the relevance of action planning are only under two SOs above 70%. SO4.2 projects assess the elaboration of the action plan most often as fully relevant (72%), followed by SO4.1 projects (71%).

When compared to the 2018 survey results, the new pattern shows a better appreciation of action planning only among SO4.2 projects. SO1.1, SO2.1 and SO3.1 projects judge the elaboration less relevant, whereas projects of SO1.2 and SO4.1 made a more or less similar judgement.

Figure 2 - Relevance of action plan elaboration, by SO

"An action plan is essential to have the main lessons learnt (and good practices identified) from the exchange of experience implemented in the region in the end."
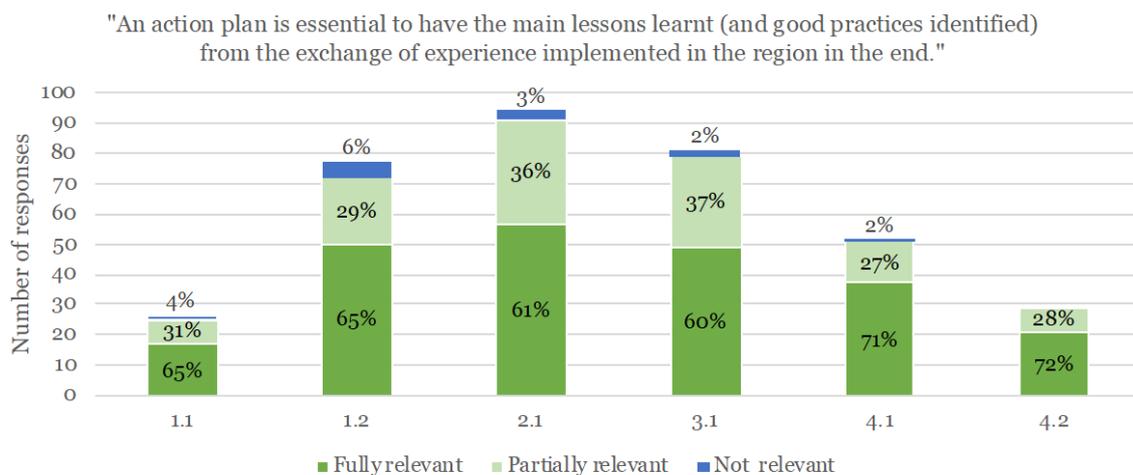
Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=347)

Optional implementation of "pilot actions" at the beginning of phase 2

An implementation of pilot actions within projects at the beginning of phase 2 is optional and only dedicated to testing the practicability of one or more measures foreseen by the adopted action plans. As pilot actions are exceptionally financed by Interreg Europe, very clear and also detailed rules / procedures were set out in the programme manual[86].

Overall, 52% of the respondents assess the implementation of one or more pilot actions as fully relevant. However, 36% consider pilot actions as partially relevant and 12% even assess such actions as not

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[86] Interreg Europe Programme Manual, pp.50-52

relevant (i.e. 22 project lead partners and 21 project partners)[87]. Project partners assess pilot actions more frequent as fully relevant (56%) against project lead partners (42%), but the shares of partial relevance are similar (respectively 36% and 37%). 8% of the project partners assess pilot actions as not relevant against 22% among project lead partners.

The relatively high shares of respondents assessing pilot actions as not relevant are often due to the fact that respondents did not need to implement any pilot actions for testing the practicability of their policy improvement measures. Respondents specified that the relevance of pilot actions depends, among others, on the type of policy improvement measure defined, on the commitment of players who are implementing these actions and on the timing.

At the level of the individual SOs (see: Figure 3), however, strong variations between the respective patterns of response do exist. SO1.2 projects assess pilot actions most frequent as fully relevant, followed by SO1.1 and SO3.1 projects. Judgements on partial relevance and non-relevance are most important in case of projects under SO4.1, SO4.2 and SO2.1.

When compared to the 2018 survey results, the new pattern shows a better appreciation of pilot action implementation only in case of SO1.2 and SO4.2 projects. Respondents from projects of all other SOs indicate less often that implementing pilot actions is fully relevant.

Figure 3 - Relevance of the optional implementation of pilot actions, by SO
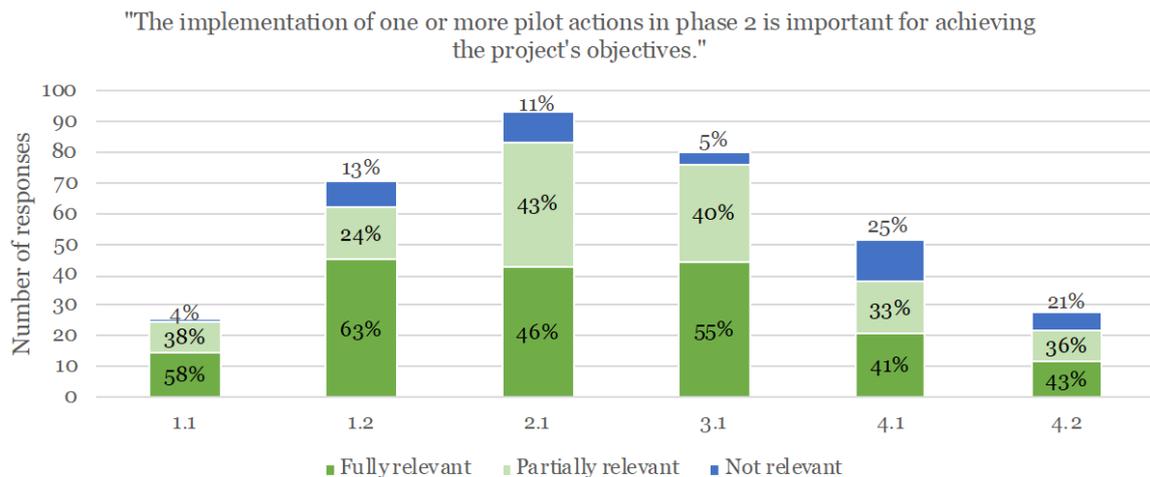
Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=349)

Phase 2 activities for monitoring the implementation of action plans

Overall, only 45% of the respondents consider the current phase 2 activities for monitoring the implementation of action plans as fully relevant. 50% assess this monitoring as partially relevant and 5% assess it as not relevant. 2 project lead partners and 15 project partners assessed the approach as not relevant.

Project lead partners and project partners assess the phase 2 monitoring activities similarly. Only the share of project partners that assess the approach as not relevant is higher as expressed above. As a

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[87] This feedback should be considered with caution, since judgements may very much depend on whether the responding project partners are themselves implementing a pilot action or not.

consequence, project lead partners assess more frequent that the 2-phase approach is partially relevant (55%) than project partners (49%).

Respondents specified that the relevance of the phase 2 monitoring approach depends, among others, on the type of measures defined in the action plan, the time needed to see the results / impact of the defined measures and the involvement, engagement and commitment of regional or local stakeholders. Also the available budget for financing phase 2 activities and the impossibility to allocate funds between the two phases of projects were issues raised.

At the level of the six SOs (see: Figure 4), only little differences are observed between the patterns of response. SO1.1 projects judge the phase 2 monitoring approach most positive (58%), whereas the other SOs show more or less similar shares of positive judgements (i.e. between 40% and 49%). SO2.1 and SO4.1 projects have the most critical views on the phase 2 monitoring approach, as judgements on partial relevance and non-relevance account together for 60%.

When compared to the 2018 survey results, the new response pattern shows that projects under SO1.1, SO2.1 and SO4.2 appreciate the phase 2 monitoring approach more positively. Projects under the other three SOs appreciate the monitoring approach less.

Figure 4 - Relevance of phase 2 activities for monitoring the implementation of action plans, by SO

"The pre-defined phase 2 activities for monitoring the implementation of an action plan are sufficient to capture the impact of the project in the different regions."

■ Fully relevant ■ Partially relevant ■ Not relevant
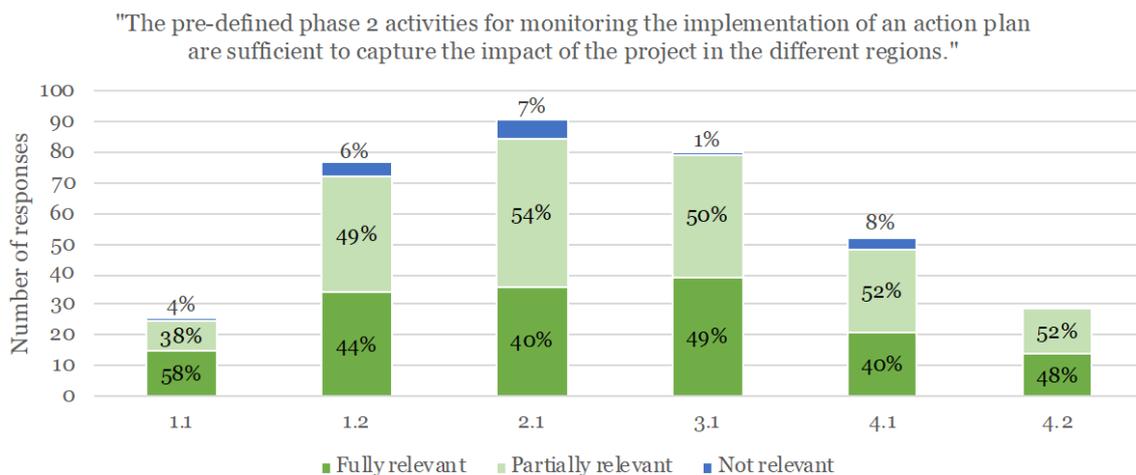
Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=355)

(2) Policy learning and the capacity increase of individuals and organisations

This section analyses the answers that respondents have given to survey questions exploring the causal relationship between the project-level policy learning process and the resulting capacity increase of individuals and/or organisations.

Achieving policy improvements through increased personal and organisational capacities

The online survey also explored to what extent an increased personal and organisational capacity is needed for achieving improvements of regional or local policy instruments in the territories covered by project partners.

The driving force behind this capacity increase are phase 1 project activities aimed at initiating a complex policy learning process that can take place at three different levels:

(1) Individual learning, through a direct involvement of staff members from partner organisations in all project activities;

(2) Organisational learning, through sharing and further developing new policy-relevant knowledge within project partner organisations;

(3) Inter-organisational learning within the concerned policy sub-systems (or stakeholder learning), through continuous interaction and exchange with other policy relevant local / regional organisations or actors in the established stakeholder groups

For uncovering the causal relationship between policy learning, capacity increase and the achievement of policy improvements, lead partners and project partners were first asked to specify the types of policy improvements foreseen in their action plans. Then, survey participants were asked to determine the importance of learning processes for achieving the envisaged policy improvements. Finally, survey data on the above questions was further processed to establish a direct relationship between both aspects (**see box above**).

On that basis, we were able to define / categorise more closely the notion of increased capacity that is required for achieving policy improvements.

Types of policy improvement applied and overall approach of the action plans

Across all SOs of Interreg Europe (see: Figure 5), the most frequently applied option for policy improvement is the implementation of new projects (type 1: 42% of all responses). At the 2nd and 3rd position are changes in the management of policy instruments (type 2: 33% of all responses) and changes in the strategic focus of policy instruments (type 3: 24% of all responses). When compared to the 2018 survey results, the new response pattern shows only slight shifts for types 1 and 2 (i.e. type 1 improvements decrease and type 2 improvements increase) and the same share for type 3.

Figure 5 - Policy improvements foreseen in the actions plans of project lead partners and partners, all SOs (*)

Which types of policy improvements are foreseen in your action plan?
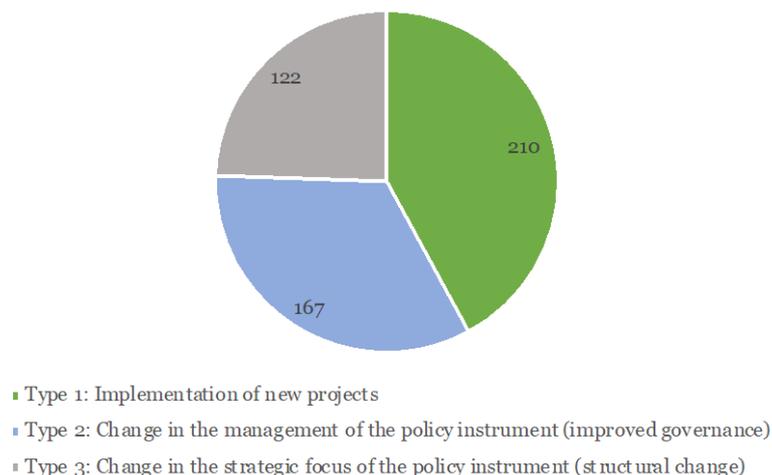
- Type 1: Implementation of new projects
- Type 2: Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)
- Type 3: Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)

(*) Respondents could select either a single type or combine various types in order to reflect best which policy improvements are defined (or will be foreseen) in their action plans. The possibility for multiple choices results in a total number of responses being higher than the number of lead partners / project partners having participated in the online survey.

Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=337)

At the level of the six SOs of Interreg Europe (see: Figure 6), however, **the three types of policy improvement play quite different roles:**

- An implementation of new projects (type 1) is in relative terms most important for an improvement of regional innovation infrastructure policies (SO 1.1: around 57% of all responses). For three other SOs, this policy improvement option is either at or slightly above the overall average (SO1.2, SO2.1 and SO3.1). The lowest relative importance is observed for an improvement of policies that aim at enhancing a resource-efficient economy (SO 4.2: 33% of all responses).

- A change in the management of policy instruments (type 2) is most important for an improvement of policies enhancing the natural and culture heritage (SO 4.1: 43% of all responses) and a resource-efficient economy (SO 4.2: 40% of all responses). A still above-average level of importance is also observed for an improvement of policies enhancing a low carbon economy (SO 3.1: 35% of all responses). Type 2 improvements are least important for regional innovation infrastructure policies (SO 1.1: around 19% of all responses).

- A structural change of policy instruments (type 3) is most important for improving innovation delivery policies (SO 1.2: 28% of all responses), but to some extent also for an improvement of policies addressing SMEs competitiveness and a resource-efficient economy (SO 2.1 and SO4.2: each 26% of all responses). Type 3 improvements are least important for policies enhancing the natural and culture heritage (SO 4.1: 20% of all responses).

Figure 6 - Types of policy improvements foreseen in the actions plans, by SO (*)
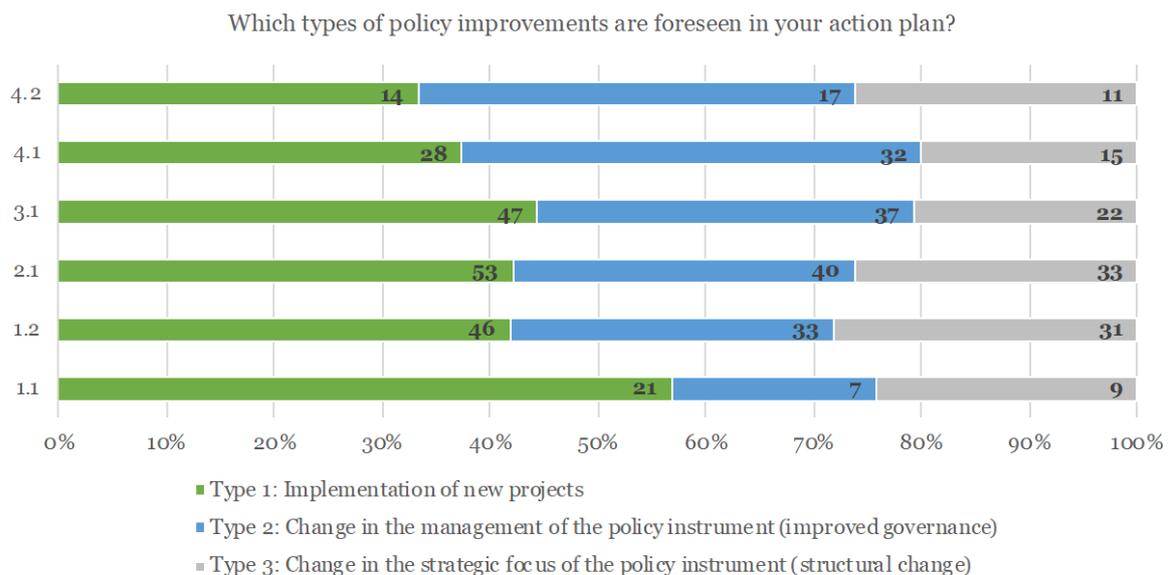
Which types of policy improvements are foreseen in your action plan?

- Type 1: Implementation of new projects
- Type 2: Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)
- Type 3: Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)

(*) Respondents could select either a single type or combine various types in order to reflect best which policy improvements are defined (or will be foreseen) in their action plans. The possibility for multiple choices results in a total number of responses being higher than the number of lead partners / project partners having participated in the online survey.

Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=337)

The **overall approaches of the action plans** adopted by project lead partners and project partners **can be characterised as follows (see: Table 1):**

- Around 61% of the responding lead partners / partners (204) implement only one of the three types of policy improvement. Within this group, the most frequently selected type is the implementation of new projects (type 1: 50%), followed by a change in the management of policy instruments (type 2: 34%) and a structural change of policy instruments (type 3: 16%).

- Around 32% of the respondents (107) combine two of the three types of policy improvement within their action plans. Most often they combine "new projects" with a "change in the management" (type 1 & type 2) and "new projects" with a "structural change" (type 1 & type 3). A purely governance-oriented combination (type 2 & type 3) is less frequently adopted.

- Only around 8% of the respondents (26) have included all three types of policy improvements within their action plans and are thereby implementing a rather demanding policy improvement approach.

For each approach, there are also strong variations in the frequency of use across the six SOs. This tends to reflect the fact that policy improvements are always tailored to the theme-specific context conditions and also to the particular needs of every project (lead) partner.

Table 1 – Overall approach of actions plans adopted by project lead partners and partners

Approach	Total	SO1.1	SO1.2	SO2.1	SO3.1	SO4.1	SO4.2
Only type 1	102	14	23	27	22	11	5
Only type 2	69	0	14	20	16	14	5
Only type 3	33	2	7	8	9	5	2
Type 1 and type 2	45	3	6	8	13	10	5
Type 1 and type 3	36	3	11	13	5	2	2
Type 2 and type 3	26	3	7	7	1	3	5
Types 1, 2 and 3	26	1	6	5	7	5	2

Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=337)

Importance of learning processes for achieving the envisaged policy improvements

A total of 353 lead partners and project partners have judged the importance of the three levels of policy learning that Interreg Europe considers relevant for achieving regional / local policy improvements **(see: Figure 7).**

Figure 7 – Importance of the different levels of policy learning, all SOs and all respondents for each level

How important are the different levels of learning for actually influencing the addressed policy instruments? Please select for each learning level only one option that corresponds most to your experience and comment your overall choice.
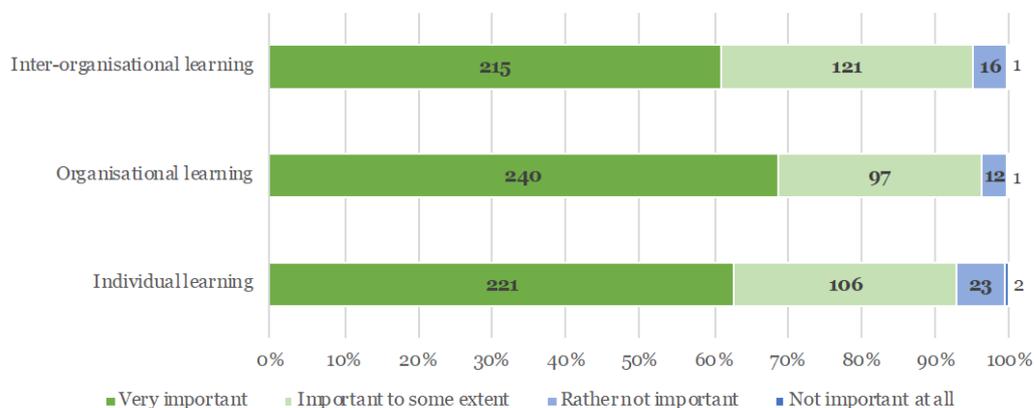
	Very important	Important to some extent	Rather not important	Not important at all
Inter-organisational learning	215	121	16	1
Organisational learning	240	97	12	1
Individual learning	221	106	23	2

A large majority of the respondents (60% or more) consider all three levels of policy learning to be very important, although some variations exist between the learning levels:

- Clearly **most important is "learning within the project partner organisations" (around 69%).** The involved public institutions and authorities or other semi-public organisations are important places where newly acquired policy-relevant knowledge can be shared more widely and also be lifted at a higher "hierarchical level", so that it may actually be used for supporting decisions on improving policy instruments.

- **"Learning of individual staff members"** from project partner organisations who are directly involved in all interregional and local/regional project activities is at a second position **(around 63%).** These persons are the indispensable "transmission belts" who acquire new policy-relevant knowledge (e.g. via the interregional exchange of experience) and introduce this knowledge into the respective project partner organisations.

- **"Inter-organisational learning within the relevant policy sub-system"** comes last in the judgement of the respondents **(around 61%).** This level of importance is clearly below the above observed level of relevance for a continuous interaction with regional / local organisations in the stakeholder groups, which 77% of the respondents consider crucial for achieving an improvement of policy instruments. This difference might be explained by the fact that interaction is indeed highly relevant, but that the associated gain of knowledge for policy improvements is not always at a comparable level of importance.

When this new response pattern is compared to that of the 2018 survey, two observations can be made. First, the overall "ranking" of the three learning levels has not changed. Second, more respondents now assess each learning level as "rather not important" to achieving policy improvements, although the overall shares of these responses remain relatively low. Lead Partners and project partners from SO1.2 and SO2.1 assess most frequently learning to be rather not important for improving policy instruments (**see: Figure 8**).

Figure 8 – The respondents' judgements on "rather not important" policy learning, by SOs

Number of respondents assessing "rather not important"

■ Individual learning ■ Organisational learning ■ Inter-organisational learning
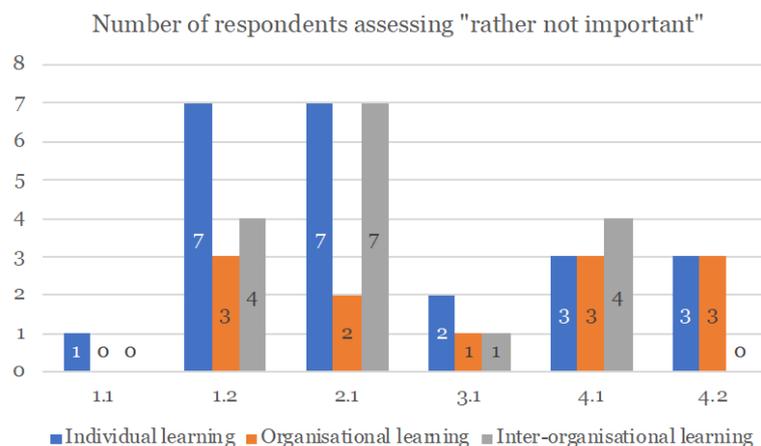
Defining and categorising the notion of increased capacity

In order to interconnect the still separate information on action plan approaches and on importance of learning, survey data had to be processed further. This made it possible to compare the importance of learning under each approach for policy improvement and, at the same time, to establish an extended causal relationship between those aspects and the capacity increase required for policy improvements.

The assumptions underlying this relation are that every learning process is associated with a specific form of capacity increase and that a respondent's judgement on the importance of a learning process equally reflects the importance given to the related capacity increase.

On the basis of the three learning levels, the overall term "capacity increase" can now be defined in more detail: it comprises (1) a capacity increase of individual staff members from the project partner institution / organisation and (2) a capacity increase of the entire project partner institution / organisation, but also (3) a joint capacity increase involving a project partner institution / organisation and other stakeholder organisations[88].

However, the three dimensions of **this capacity increase can play different roles within the action plans** that lead partners and project partners have adopted for implementing their policy improvements (**see: Table 2**).

Table 2 – Importance of capacity increase for realising the envisaged policy improvements, all SOs

Dimension of capacity increase and level of importance (**)	Action Plan approaches ...						
	... applying only one type (*)			... combining two or three types (*)			
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Types 1 & 2	Types 1 & 3	Types 2 & 3	Types 1, 2 & 3
Capacity increase of individual staff members from the project partner institution or organisation (achievable through individual learning)	+	++	+	++	++	++	++
Capacity increase of the entire project partner institution or organisation (achievable through organisational learning)	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Joint capacity increase of the project partner institution / organisation and of other stakeholder organisations (achievable through inter-organisational learning)	++	++	++	++	++	++	+
(*) Type 1 = Implementation of new projects; Type 2 = Changes in the management of the policy instruments (improved governance); Type 3 = Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change) *(**) ++ = very important; + = limited importance; 0 = not important*							

Source: online survey among selected call 1, 2 and 3 projects (n=353)

The main features can be summarised as follows:

- A capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations is highly important under all action plan approaches, irrespectively of whether only one specific type of policy improvement or a combination of various policy improvement types is implemented

- Also a joint capacity increase of project partner institutions / organisations and of other policy-relevant stakeholder organisations is highly important under nearly all action plan approaches. Only in case of a combined implementation of all three policy improvement types, however, it seems that this capacity increase is of limited importance.

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[88] For example by forging "advocacy coalitions" among political decision makers, administrations and other stakeholder organisations or by establishing new topic-focussed cooperation networks acting as drivers for experimenting alternative paths in regional or local development.

- A capacity increase of individual staff members from project partner organisations is highly important under all approaches that combine various types of policy improvement. When it comes to implementing only one type of policy improvement, however, a capacity increase of individual staff members is often only of limited importance (esp. in case of type 1 and type 3 improvements).

- Under four out of the seven approaches of action plans, all three dimensions of capacity increase (i.e. personal, organisational and inter-organisational) are very important for achieving the envisaged single or combined policy improvements. A slightly lower overall importance is only observed for approaches implementing type 1 and type 3 policy improvements and the approach implementing all three types.

The above-described categorisation suggests that the organisational dimension of capacity increase (i.e. in partner institutions/organisation or in other stakeholder organisations) is very important for achieving policy change, whereas an increased capacity of individuals is in overall terms somewhat less important.

It should however be remembered that this categorisation of capacity increase was "theoretically" obtained through processing opinions of respondents from organisations that are sometimes directly in charge of improving a policy instrument, but sometimes also not. These observations should therefore not be understood as practical rules of thumb for realising policy change within projects, as context conditions and needs are very different in each partner area.

7.10 Annex X – Suggestions of survey respondents for future cooperation and learning

Out of the 233 survey respondents who used the commenting field for providing an answer to the question "*For the future Interreg Europe programme (2021-2027), which improvements would you suggest in relation to the learning process*?", a total of 200 respondents have elaborated more or less detailed suggestions.

An in-depth analysis of these suggestions for improvement shows that they can be assigned to four broad thematic categories. Although references to multiple topics and overlaps do very often exist, the respondents' suggestions focus on

- the basic "method" for interregional cooperation and policy learning;
- the "structures and actors" required for successful cooperation and learning;
- the "processes" for delivering cooperation and learning;
- "communication and dissemination".

The following structured presentation does not necessarily reproduce the 200 comments made one by one, as many suggestions were combined with other similar comments. It may also be the case that some comments suggest aspects that can already be carried out by Interreg Europe projects or seem to contradict each other due to opposing views of different respondents.

(1) The basic "method" for interregional cooperation and policy learning

Half of the respondent made suggestions for further improving the current methods for interregional cooperation and policy learning (100 comments).

A number of comments highlight that better early-stage practical guidance for interregional cooperation and policy learning should be provided both at the programme and the project level. A large number of comments suggest improving the basic methods for both the current interregional cooperation process and the current policy learning process. Another large part of the comments refers specifically to individual cooperation activities (e.g. interregional meetings, study visits, staff exchanges, peer reviews), whose continuation is generally desired but sometimes in a slightly modified form.

On the whole, however, it can be clearly deduced from the large number of suggestions made that the current methods and cooperation tools are generally held in high esteem.

Suggestions for a provision of early-stage practical guidance on cooperation and policy learning:

- The future programme should provide more practical guidance on how to develop, organise and implement a successful policy learning process. Also a general guide on "group work dynamics" for better involving policy relevant stakeholders should be elaborated.
- The future programme should more clearly define the very nature (or features) of a good practice in order to create a common understanding that can support the design of future projects.
- The future programme should provide practical guidance for study visits to ensure good learning processes on the encountered / examined good practices.

- The future programme should give earlier and clearer guidance on pilot actions (esp. funding) and also on the implementation of action plans.

- At the project-level, the lead partner is very important and should provide the context and structure so that all partners have the same understanding of the addressed policy instruments and can work on identifying / comparing relevant good practices. This can be achieved by organising a seminar at the beginning of the project, at which the main concepts and topics of the project are explained. Also the joint learning process needs to be framed at the beginning of a project and especially stakeholder organisations need to be prepared to this process.

Suggestions for improving the basic cooperation method:

- A shorter duration of projects should be envisaged (i.e. 4 or 5 years is too long to keep everyone in the right modus). Especially changes in the political environment due to new elections can change the mind-set of decision makers during the project. This often makes it difficult to implement action plans. Also project partners might little by little show a lack of attention.

- There should be a move away from the strong focus on ERDF-funded Regional Operational Programmes. For partners it was often not possible to influence the ROP in their region. Also the focus on a minimum number of partners having to influence Structural Funds instruments should be reviewed. Finally, the policy impact of action plans should not be limited to EU Structural Funds instruments only.

- Project-level cooperation should not only focus on learning from technicians and organisations. A less theoretical cooperation approach and more hands on activities are needed.

- Phase 1 should not only include partner workshops, conferences and collecting good practices for the policy learning process. An even more important impact on learning emerges from peer reviews and study visits as well as from regional / local meetings with stakeholders and a broader audience.

- The cooperation approach should combine more closely the development of skills with a practical improvement of policy instruments. Also by "doing things", project partners gain additional experiences and new practice-based capacities. Moreover, policy instruments can be changed more easy if local / regional politicians see the direct impact of research results in real life (i.e. demonstrating concrete results through pilot actions is therefore really important).

- For phase 2, an increased budget for project management should be made available (i.e. in a realistic relation). This is because there is still a lot of administrative work to do in relation to that part of the project.

- During phase 2, more interregional interaction within projects is needed. This would facilitate the implementation of the lessons learned (e.g. include phase 2 "peer reviews" from other partner regions when implementing a regional action plan).

- Phase 2 should put more emphasis on implementing the action plans and make available financial resources for this. With this budget, pilot projects should be supported that practically apply good practices and demonstrate the validity of new or improved instruments.

- Future action plans should define clear outputs that can be monitored. In addition, the name "Action Plan" should be changed to "Strategic Policy Plan".

- The future programme should be more open to counting also indirect or long-term effects that emerge from an improvement of policy instruments.

- Decrease the focus on implementing actions for policy changes.

Suggestions for improving the basic policy learning method:

- The learning process during phase 1 should always be 3 years. The future programme should also define clear targets for the policy learning phase.

- Already from the beginning of the policy learning process, project partners should start thinking about potential actions in their Action Plans.

- Each phase of the learning process should be concluded with a report on learning. A requirement to review the learning process should be introduced, together with a check on the feasibility of adopting good practices in the other regions.

- The learning process is mainly focussed on good practices that are able to influence ERDF-related policy instruments. For some policy fields, however, ERDF-funded programmes are sometimes "closed" or do only foresee smaller funding budgets in the regions. Policy learning should therefore be stronger focussed on other funding instruments (EU, national etc.). Also the search for potential synergies between different policies could be interesting.

- The learning process should not only focus on influencing existing policy instruments but also future ones. Especially projects from later calls often deal with EU-level policy instruments that are in their final stages of implementation. Consequently, there are only limited or no potentials to influence their on-going support activities. For projects in this situation, it would be a good option to influence the future programming period (e.g. by transferring experiences and good practices to those actors in charge of preparing policy instruments for the future programming period).

- More opportunities for bilateral learning processes within projects should exist. Multilateral settings involve a variety differences (e.g. language command, culture, expertise, courage to speak up in a group and most importantly the level of personal interest and engagement) that can sometimes be too complex for really "building bridges" between regions.

- The policy learning process should also include trainings for local / regional stakeholders and partners.

- The learning process is until now only about influencing a policy instrument, but more focus on generating policy-relevant knowledge is needed to be able to innovate.

- New methods like design thinking should be introduced into the policy learning process.

- Instruments should be developed that allow project partners to learn from each other within a digital environment. This can be achieved by introducing new digital platforms for online learning.

- The policy learning process is important, but the programme should be more flexible on how this learning process is conceived (Who should be involved?), as the situation is very different in each region.

Suggestions for improving policy learning in relation to good practices:

- The exchange of good practices between partner regions and the learning on good practices should be continued as much as possible. Sharing a good practice with partners saves time and money since they don't have to invest in discovering something that already exists.

- There should be a stricter interregional methodological approach for documentation of good practices and potential knowledge transfers. If good practices are insufficiently documented, it is difficult to discern what the critical elements that characterise a good practice and what the elements that can be transferred and replicated are. Such an approach can strengthen the analysis of good practices by partners / stakeholders and accelerate the learning process. Therefore, the whole programme would benefit from a more rigorous framework for identifying and documenting good practice.

- Within projects, more interrogation of submitted good practices should be made. The focus needs to be on the learning that can be achieved from the good practices as opposed to just showcasing their outcome. The lead partner needs to be given more responsibility to ensure that the right focus of a good practice is presented and that it is clear how it can be replicated. Alternatively, good practices could also be chosen through (project-level) peer reviews.

- As opposed to the above statements, a few respondents suggest the future programme should be less prescriptive about good practices and encourage a wider range of ideas. The learning process should not just focus on good practices because learning from mistakes or failures also provides a clear understanding about risks and problems.

Suggestions for "interregional exchange of experience seminars or workshops":

- More international meetings / events should be foreseen as mandatory. Also more participants from each partner should come to international meetings (esp. stakeholder organisations).

- In addition to direct meetings, also the use of teleconferences and other on-line tools should be promoted. Virtual activities would help to substitute a significant number of trips to direct project partner meetings.

- The learning process should also be inspired by exchanging interesting developments with other Interreg Europe projects active in the same thematic field.

- It should be possible to exchange knowledge and learn from measures of countries / regions outside project consortium (if relevant and best practices are available). During phase 1 of a project, for example, there should be the possibility to organise at least one interregional learning event (with appropriate budget) where other projects or initiatives are invited to present appropriate good practices.

Suggestions for "peer reviews":

- Good experiences were made with peer reviews (i.e. a small group comprising delegates of different partners that visits another partner for a few days to learn and review policies and programmes on site). A peer review helps both the reviewed partner and those participating in the peer review team to enhance their understanding and awareness for possible solutions (good practices).

- The peer review methodology is the best way to make people think about how to translate the experiences of others into the context of each participating region.

- A joint peer review methodology similar to that used by the S3 platform should be defined.

- During phase 2, also peer reviews should be possible to get deeper information about certain good practices and policy improvement approaches that are part of the implemented action plans.

Suggestions for "study visits" and "staff exchanges" (or combinations of these, either within a project or between different projects):

- Instead of general study visits organised back-to-back to Steering Committee meetings (often also with "touristic" components), more thematically focussed field visits with exchanges among a restricted group of partners should be foreseen.

- Once it is decided which policy experiences will be transferred, project efforts should be concentrated on learning and realising study visits.

- For the learning process, more study visits to good practice examples (on-site visits) should be realised, because "seeing-and-feeling" the different spirits and mind-sets in the countries is crucial.

- Concrete measures for increasing the interregional exchange among stakeholder organisations from different regions should be considered. It should even be made mandatory that project partners include other regional / local stakeholder organisations in their study visit delegations. This helps the specific project partner organisation to see the full range of learnings available, and also provides the other stakeholder organisations with more opportunities of exchange with all involved territories.

- More study visits should also be possible in phase 2. Study visits are an essential point for the implementation of action plans, as they allow to directly experience success cases or to have the opportunity to solve specific doubts of the implementation process.

- Staff exchanges should remain an important element of the interregional cooperation process, as they support mutual learning during the exchange of experience phase. During phase 2, also exchanges of staff from stakeholder or partner organisations should be possible to get deeper information about certain good practices/approaches that are part of the implemented action plans.

- There should be possibilities for projects to organise further interregional exchanges that could not be predicted at the beginning of a project.

- Interregional exchange visits could be connected to the partners' field work activities. For example, it would be interesting to have a bilateral "job shadowing" that involves a 2-3 days visit to see how other organisation conceive or implement policies.

- Introduce an exchange activity that provides options for cross-fertilisation between projects (incl. related finances/eligible expenditures for common events and staff exchanges between different projects): based on common issues, each project partner should be allowed to visit events and/or make staff exchanges with up to 3 different projects outside the own project, after approval by the partnership or the lead partners of the other projects.

Suggestions for improving the role of the "Policy Learning Platform":

- As policy learning is an ongoing process, it would be interesting to increase the use of the PLP by projects through acknowledging its value in terms of "lifelong education".

- The PLP online database of good practices is a helpful tool for supporting project-level cooperation, but it should be improved and widened by including good practices from non-Interreg Europe regions (i.e. not only from project partner institutions).

- The PLP should be more intuitive and easy to use because the categories of the good practices are too general and the format is not practical (i.e. the big picture on the top doesn't allow you to see the information at a glance).

- The PLP should stimulate exchanges between the Interreg Europe projects. As especially local / regional stakeholder organisations can often not travel to the many good practice sites, it would be good that more PLP workshops are organised to which several "good practice owners" come to discuss a possible knowledge transfer. If a bigger group of stakeholders can pull information / learn directly from these good practice owners, this is could also support project implementation.

- The PLP knowledge part should be strengthened and the research activities as well.

- In the future, service offers of the PLP should be available at an earlier stage to be useful for projects during their "learning phase 1".

(2) The "structures" and "actors" required for successful cooperation and learning

A larger number of respondents also made suggestions for improving the structures of interregional cooperation and especially the scope of actors to be involved in the interregional and local learning processes (47 comments).

Whereas the overall adequacy of already existing cooperation structures is in general confirmed by the respondents, many comments also show that there is still considerable scope for improving / optimising the composition of project partnerships and also the involvement of other policy relevant actors. One part of the suggestions is more generally related to cooperation structures and actors, while the other part focuses in particular on the role of local/regional stakeholder groups.

General issues relating to structures and actors:

- For a more concentrated / intense policy learning process, a somewhat stricter mechanism (or formal structure) should be foreseen to ensure the learning of partner organisations (and not only individual learning). Also continuous interaction and learning between organisations present in the stakeholder groups should be enhanced, for example by setting up virtual "learning platforms".

- In the new Interreg Europe programme, the cooperation structure "mini-programmes" should again be allowed. They should allow also sub-project partners (stakeholders) to be directly involved in the project activities, especially in the innovative topics of the future.

- A future programme should ensure that projects have well-selected and qualified partners. Especially for the learning process it is important to have different development degrees between the project partners, otherwise all partners are doing the same and therefore there is not much to learn from each other. However, too much heterogeneity in a project partnership can also make joint work processes very challenging.

- The current instruments and structures for project-level exchange of experience and learning are good. However, the formal involvement of regions should be improved in future projects if they are responsible for a policy instrument that will be improved by action plans. Especially the direct involvement of Managing Authorities for regional operational programmes in the policy learning process should be encouraged more strongly.

- It should be made sure that only organisations mandated to policy change can become partners (i.e. public authorities in charge of a policy instrument), so that they can comply with the policy learning and policy improvement philosophy promoted by Interreg Europe.

- The role of cities should be given greater attention when designing the new programme because they are also main players in the implementation of policy instruments. Currently, however, it seems that the main role and priorities are given to the regions.

- Policy makers should be involved in projects from the very beginning and also participate in meetings (as far as possible) to be really connected to the project process. However, it is sometimes difficult to involve high level decision-makers in regional / local events or interregional meetings due to time restrictions. Nevertheless, their involvement can be ensured by other ways (e.g. "virtual" participation in events or contributions to workshops etc.).

- There should be a stronger involvement of the NGO sector, not only as participants in the local stakeholder groups but also in the direct implementation of projects (i.e. as project partners, because NGOs often have very good and efficient ideas for policy improvement).

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Suggestions on the future role of local / regional stakeholder groups:

- The involvement of other "project-external" local / regional stakeholder organisations is very important, wherefore the number of stakeholder group meetings should be further increased. The

direct involvement of stakeholder organisations in the exchange of experience is fruitful, because it allows linking the policymaking level to the operational policy level, thereby allowing an exchange of experience between technicians from both sides.

- One of the keys to success is the quality and completeness of the stakeholder group that follows the cooperation path. It has to involve all those who can make a contribution to the process of improving governance. In the opposite case, when the core project partner group is dominated by "policy" and "academic" actors, the achievement of policy improvements can also fail in practice (e.g. when directly concerned practitioners from a specific targeted sector and from the civil society were minority players in the project).

- The role of local exchanges to improve policies should be scaled up and better recognised by Interreg Europe. The local exchange process is as important as the interregional process, because good practices are "reproduced" locally across all partners of a project.

- It should become possible to "buy in" external expertise for the local / regional stakeholder meetings. Meetings should be organised following the principle of "give and take" (i.e. project goals and actions are discussed with stakeholders, but they are also offered something new or interesting that can be "taken away"), otherwise the stakeholders will not take the time to participate permanently.

- Also during the second phase of projects, local / regional stakeholders should still play a key role. Their participation in meetings (local or interregional) and their travel expenses should therefore be foreseen in the project budget and the actions. This would also in general make the 2-phases concept of projects more attractive for regions.

(3) The "processes" for delivering interregional cooperation and learning

A larger number of respondents also made suggestions for improving process-related aspects of interregional cooperation and learning (47 comments).

While most respondents clearly confirm the adequacy of already existing processes, others also wish to see some further improvements. One part of these suggestions is more generally related to cooperation and the learning process, while the other part focuses in particular on a re-organisation and enlargement of the policy learning process.

Suggestions generally relating to cooperation and the learning process:

- Interreg Europe should allow for greater flexibility and freedoms in the overall process, but in particular simplify rules and procedures during the implementation phase.

- There should be more operational and financial flexibility between the two phases of projects. Some flexibility in terms of how project deliverables must be structured would also be beneficial. The differing contexts the project partners are operating in sometime mean that outcome completion according to pre-defined deliverable templates can be a challenge.

- As policy instruments to be improved have to be defined at the beginning of a project, more flexibility is needed when the implementation reality of instruments changes over the years (e.g. a shift of competencies in the responsible bodies).

- More flexibility should also exist for newly emerging and necessary actions that were initially not suggested in the project proposal.

- Institutions or (public) organisations are quite good at designing technical aspects, but sometimes not at structuring and delivering the planned learning process. More direct assistance, for example through stronger involving well-qualified and generally proven experts, could therefore be very beneficial. Furthermore, the learning process should also put a stronger focus on individual and organisational learning.

- More focus should be put on stakeholder involvement and the facilitation of stakeholder interaction to support the implementation and local ownership of policy improvements. Due to this, stakeholders of the different partners should also actively enter an international dimension and take part in interregional meetings or other interregional exchanges. Moreover, stakeholder organisations should be actively involved in regional / local or interregional processes for monitoring the action plan implementation (e.g. by covering the costs for their participation in local / regional or interregional meetings).

Suggestions for re-organising and enlarging the policy learning process:

- Also the policy learning process should be improved, by organising it differently and with more length (esp. extension to phase 2) as well as by allocating more funds to this important action.

- During the interregional learning process, more attention should be paid to ensuring narrow and fluent communication between all partners. Partners usually contact each other only in the days before interregional meetings, but not frequently enough in the periods in between those meetings (e.g. at least weekly contacts). Therefore, interactions between partners and stakeholders of different countries need to be more continuous throughout the learning process. Using more often webinars and online trainings or other virtual meetings could be beneficial for the learning process and also make it easier to involve more people in the learning process.

- Another aspect difficult to understand is that "learning" is a phase differentiated from "implementing", although both aspects reinforce each other. Policy learning relies on education (i.e. knowledge accumulation), putting into practice acquired knowledge, monitoring implementation and finally a further learning from the adaptations that were achieved in the local circumstances. The learning process should therefore be extended to phase 2. At least one year of overlapping between both phases should be allowed to ensure that continuous learning is also part of a sound and successful implementation phase. Even better would be the option for the learning process to continue right to the end of the project by allowing project's to set their own pathway (i.e. if that means more meetings in phase 2, then that should be permissible).

- During phase 2, also peer reviews and study visits of stakeholders or partner staff should be possible to get deeper information about certain good practices/approaches that are part of the implemented action plans (see also comments above under point 1 on "method"). Especially peer reviews among project partners and among them and other projects sharing similar topics should be boosted. Peer reviews are the most useful learning tool because they are focused on the concrete aspect of action plan implementation where recommendations are needed (i.e. workshops are more important in phase 1 for identifying good practices and for boosting the relations among project partner regions).

(4) Communication and dissemination

Several respondents also made suggestions for improving communication and dissemination on results in the context of future project-level cooperation (12 comments, also including overlapping comments).

- Interreg Europe should foresee a higher project budget for disseminating the activities and results of projects (i.e. dedicated budget line for printing materials or for web and social media advertising).

- Interreg Europe should introduce common online tools and platforms for all project partners to share documents, to gather good practices and to stimulate learning and capacity building.

- At the project level, greater use of online technologies / tools for project-internal cooperation will also enhance mutual communication (i.e. though more regular "virtual" contacts, meetings or conferences), facilitate reporting and make a sharing of thematic information or results easier. Furthermore, the stronger use of online tools could also help to substitute a significant number of trips for attending face-to-face activities or meetings.

- It would be a big boost if the process of knowledge acquisition and learning within projects could be more easily shared. For example, presentations at events should be captured by videos that are made accessible online. This would increase the durability of a project and also enable people who cannot attend all meetings to still "consume" the accomplished learnings.

- As projects are often followed in different phases by different persons, it is important that previous learning steps are made available online (e.g. through podcasts, recorded webinars, etc.) so that "newcomers" can follow these steps at different stages of the project lifecycle.

- At the end of their lifetime, projects should produce a short movie that illustrates how the learning took place at the interregional level and within each partner region and how these processes influenced the projects' results. By collecting and presenting such visual products / show-casings online, Interreg Europe would make it possible for users to compare different countries or policy-settings and to extract aspects than can be used in their own country and system.

7.11   Annex XI – Approved pilot actions of projects from the 1st and 2nd calls (Status: 23rd April 2020)

Projects	Call	SO	Title of pilot action (approved by MC)	Partner	County	Budget (EUR)
1 pilot action for projects of SO1.1 "Innovation infrastructure"						**127.700**
BRIDGES	1	1.1	Transregional access to innovation on demand	PP2 Regional Council of Kainuu, PP4 Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council Regional Development, PP5 Regional Development Agency of Western Macedonia	FI, EL	127.700
18 pilot actions for projects of SO1.2 "Innovation delivery"						**857.886**
MONITORIS3	2	1.2	Monitoring of Behavioural Changes Towards Innovation in Galician SMEs	LP Galician Innovation Agency (GAIN)	ES, NO	51.750
MONITORIS3	2	1.2	A new approach for Improvement of RIS3 Monitoring Systems	PP2 WRDA	RO	27.850
MONITORIS3	2	1.2	Innovation Attitudes measurement survey	PP6 CCDR-N	PT, NO	21.780
MONITORIS3	2	1.2	Innovation brokerage for improving ERDF policy instruments	PP4 Veneto Region	IT	30.240
NICHE	1	1.2	Food destination brand	PP3 Derry and Strabane Dictrict Council	IE	38.625
NICHE	1	1.2	Eat local	PP1 RDA of West Region Romania	RO	31.550
NICHE	1	1.2	First stop shop	PP2 Donegal County Council	IE	44.180
NICHE	1	1.2	Food brand	PP4 Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia	FI	58.425
NICHE	1	1.2	Innovative food routes	PP7 Region of Crete	EL	31.500
NMP-REG	1	1.2	Regional Business Accelerator Programme for young entrepreneurs with focus on Nanotechnologies, advanced Materials and advanced Production technologies (NMP)	PP5 NMWP.NRW, PP4 International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory	DE, PT	86.300
OSIRIS	1	1.2	Innovation Loop	PP2 Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, PP6 Abo Akademi LP Region Vasterbotten	FI	59.625
OSIRIS	1	1.2	Boost	PP3 Provincia autonoma di Trento, PP5 CTI Diophantus	EL	46.185
OSIRIS	1	1.2	iHome4you	PP7 Municipality of Fundao, PP5 CIT Diophantus	PT	66.522
P-IRIS	2	1.2	Rural co working area	PP3 Local Development Agency PINS	HR	33.985
P-IRIS	2	1.2	Testing rural co-working hub's services	PP2 Development centre of the Heart of Slovenia	SI	78.612
S3Chem	1	1.2	Testing R&D infrastructure network for waste treatment	PP6 IDEPA	ES	32.500

S3Chem	1	1.2	Transparent presentation of ERDF funded innovation projects	LP Ministry of Economy, Sciences and Digitalisation Saxony-Anhalt, PP2 isw Institut für Strukturpolitik und Wirtschaftsförderung gGmbH	DE	36.150
TITTAN	1	1.2	The Ourense Health Living Lab pilot action	LP Galician Health Knowledge Agency (ACIS)	ES	82.110
8 pilot actions for projects of SO2.1 "SME competitiveness"						**522.123**
Destination SMEs	1	2.1	Setting up of a networking initiative for artisans and craft makers in Gozo and to develop the concept of 'Made in Gozo'	PP3 Ministry of Gozo	MT	54.000
ESSPO	1	2.1	Testing the "potentially innovative SMEs" individual diagnostics	LP Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation, Poznan Science and Technology Park	PL	78.592
iEER	1	2.1	Aula Emprende pilot action	PP1 Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, PP10 Laurea University of Applied Sciences, PP2 Westpomeranian Region, PP4 University of Applied Sciences Brandenburg, PP5 Marche Regional Authority, PP6 Hauts-de-France Innovation Development (Ex-NFID), PP7 Northern Ireland Local Government Association, PP8 Region of Southern Denmark, PP11 Institute of Technology Tralee	FI, PL, DE, IT, FR, UK, DK, IE	144.631
PURE COSMOS	1	2.1	Central Macedonia Office for Micro & Small Enterprises (CeMaO-misme)	PP4 Development Bank of Saxony-Anhalt, PP6 ANATOLIKI SA	DE, EL	50.601
Road-CSR	2	2.1	Socially Responsible Cretan Business – Mentoring Programme	PP2 Region of Crete	EL	20.000
SIE	1	2.1	Kent International Business Export Pathway	LP Kent County Council	UK	78.609
SIE	1	2.1	Vado e Torno – Erfahrungen im Ausland sammeln	PP4 Nbank	DE	29.990
SOCIAL SEEDS	1	2.1	"MarketMate" evaluation system 2.0	LP IFKA Public Benefit non-profit Ltd.	HU	65.700
24 pilot actions for projects of SO3.1 "Low carbon economy"						**1.102.510**
CISMOB	1	3.1	Real time information for bus passengers (pilot no1)	LP: University of Aveiro, P2 Stockholm University (Advisory), P3 Municipality of Agueda	PT	98.219
CLEAN	2	3.1	Normandie 50/50	PP5 Les 7 Vents	FR	31.729
CLEAN	2	3.1	Smart public ligjtning in Sancho el Sabio Street	PP3 Fomento de San Sebastian	ES	22.000
CYCLEWALK	2	3.1	Increasing capacity of decision makers to design pilot services nudging active mobility among citizens and tourists	PP2 Municipality of Olbia, PP5 Regione Sardegna	IT	57.944
CYCLEWALK	2	3.1	Mobility Management Scheme for companies in Burgenland	PP3 Regionalmanagement Burgenland	AT	29.086
EMPOWER	2	3.1	Eye2Eye – Energy visualization to the eyes of the consumer	PP6 Energy Agency for Southeast Sweden, PP8 Development bank of Saxony-Anhalt, PP9 Santander City Council	SE, DE, ES	65.775

EV ENERGY	2	3.1	Sustainable Mobility and Energy Simulation (SMES) to develop a smart energy system at Lelystad Airport and Business Park	PP2 Province of Flevoland	NL		32.001
Green Screen	2	3.1	The Grid project	LP Film London	UK		148.902
Green Screen	2	3.1	The European Environmental Calculator (Eureca) for AVP	PP3 Promálaga, PP5 Flanders Audiovisual Fund, PP9 Slovak Film Commission	ES, BE, SK		77.875
InnovaSUMP	2	3.1	Testing of Travel Behaviour Stated Preference Survey	LP Nicosia Municipality	CY		49.235
InnovaSUMP	2	3.1	Testing of Travel Behaviour Surveys and Analyses, as a new approach for SUMP innovation and Policy Instrument improvement'	PP5 Municipality of Kordelio Evosmos	EL		31.200
LAST MILE	1	3.1	Slovak Paradise Bus	PP 3 Agency For the support of Regional Development Kosice	SK		7.750
LOCARBO	1	3.1	Virtual Power Plant methodology	PP4 Durham County Council	UK		20.315
LOCARBO	1	3.1	Virtual Power Plant methodology	PP7 Alba Iulia Municipality	RO		15.625
LOCARBO	1	3.1	Virtual Power Plant methodology	PP1 Province of Potenza, PP6	IT		32.430
OptiTrans	2	3.1	IT tool for monitoring the Public Service Contract for passenger public transport in Baia Mare Metripolitain Area	PP2 Baia Mare Metropolitain Area Intercommunity Development Association	RO		78.800
REBUS	1	3.1	3-layer module for behavioural change – energy savings through better implementation of energy renovation projects	LP ARRR, PP7 Durham County Council	IT, UK		26.300
RESOLVE	1	3.1	Parklets: resolving the differences in 20m steps	PP4 Transport for Greater Manchester, PP5 Maribor Municipality	UK, SI		65.861
SCHOOL CHANCE	2	3.1	School Mobility Manager Network	LP Municipality of Girona, PP4 Regional Governement of Catalonia	ES		50.650
SOCIAL GREEN	1	3.1	Improving energy effiency and consumer behaviour in social housing	PP7 Alba Iulia Municipality, PP2 Tartu Energy Agency	RO, EE		49.100
SUPPORT	2	3.1	REDEMA - Energy Network of Andalusian Municipalities	PP8 FAMP	ES		34.089
SUPPORT	2	3.1	Save@Horea	PP6 Alba Local Energy Agency	RO		17.125
TRAM	1	3.1	Testing the efficiency of gamification platforms in motivating people to choose sustainable means of transport	PP 4 Miskolc Municipality	HU		29.750
TRAM	1	3.1	Testing the efficiency of gamification platforms in motivating people to choose sustainable means of transport	PP 5 North West RDA	RO		30.750
11 pilot actions for projects of SO4.1 "Natural & cultural heritage"							**591.703**
BID-REX	1	4.1	Evidence based nature conservation in Ljubljana Marsh Nature Park	PP7 National institute of Biology	SI		69.571

CD-ETA	1	4.1	Adapting the 3D modelling best-practice from CD-ETA project to the Estonian situation	PP8 Estonian War Museum General Laidoner Museum (EWM), PP5 Foundation for Research and Innovation (FRI)	EE	13.950
CHRISTA	1	4.1	Technological heritage interpretation facilities	LP Pafos Regional Board of Tourism	CY	53.475
CHRISTA	1	4.1	Digital Platform for cultural heritage	PP5 County Council of Granada	ES	52.476
CHRISTA	1	4.1	Innovative tool for interpretation of intangible cultural heritage	PP6 Vidzeme Tourism Association	LV	19.760
CULT-RING	2	4.1	Creation of conditions for pilgrims to visit and understand cultural and religious built heritage	PP5 Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho	PT	63.847
EPICAH	2	4.1	Constitution of one cross-border governance table	PP5 Agency for the Development of the Empolese Valdelsa	IT	37.250
Green Pilgrimage	2	4.1	UK Via Francigena Route Deep Investment	LP Kent County Council	UK	124.004
HERICOAST	1	4.1	Seascape assessment Agder	LP Vest-Agder County Council	NO	74.950
PERFECT	2	4.1	Infiltration swales/raingarden systems in the public open space "Kaskady Park"	PP7 Bratislava Karlova Ves Municipality	SK	25.220
PERFECT	2	4.1	Cornwall Green Schools Initiative	PP2 Cornwall Council	UK	57.200
7 pilot actions for projects of SO4.2 "Resource efficiency"						**376.689**
CESME	1	4.2	ROI toolkit for SMEs	PP5 Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, PP6 JPYP Business Service	FI	49.895
CIRCE	2	4.2	Agreement towards a Circular Textile sector in Catalonia	PP2 Government of Catalonia	ES	70.638
ECOWASTE4FOOD	2	4.2	Clever cooking	PP7 Devon County Council	UK	35.751
ECOWASTE4FOOD	2	4.2	Vouchers for innovative solutions limiting food waste	PP2 Wielkopolska Region with the seat of the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region in Poznan	PL	44.700
SYMBI	1	4.2	Setting up a systemic approach at supporting the industrial symbiosis process	PP5 Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy	SI	58.430
SYMBI	1	4.2	SYMBIEX 2030 – BOOSTING INDUSTRIAL SYMBIOSIS IN EXTREMADURA	LP FUNDECYT PCTEX	ES	88.475
TANIA	2	4.2	Mini (nano) remediation Laboratory In Tuscany (GISFI-SOILIA practice transfer	LP Agency for the Development of the Empolese Valdelsa, PP8 Region of Tuscany, PP3 Univ. Helsinki, PP5 Univ. Lorraine	IT	28.800

Source: Interreg Europe Excel Sheet "Overview of Pilot Action Requests April 2020".

7.12 Annex XII – Overview of achieved "influence outcomes" with high direct project effects

Project Acronym	Lead Partner (LP) or project partner (PP) addressing a policy instrument	Amount of funding influenced, in EUR
SO 1.2 - Improving innovation delivery policies		**15,953,611**
ecoRIS3	4-PP Sunrise Valley Science and Technology Park (LT)	358,820
INKREASE	5-PP Business Agency of Lower Austria "ecoplus" (AT)	351,800
InnoBridge	2-PP Universities and Higher Education Foundation of Castilla y León (ES)	749,725
NMP-REG	1-LP Agency for the development of the Empolese Valdelsa (IT)	15,000
OSIRIS	1-LP Region Vasterbotten (SE)	0
OSIRIS	7-PP Municipality of Fundão (PT)	769,906
S34Growth	6-PP AFIL - Intelligent Factory Lombardy Cluster (IT)	0
S34Growth	7-PP National Innovation Agency (PT)	13,250,000
S3Chem	5-PP Lombardy Region - DG Research, Innovation, University, Export and Internationalisation (IT)	0
S3Chem	6-PP Regional Development Agency of Asturias, 9-PP Company for Solid Waste Management in Asturias COGERSA (ES)	0
TITTAN	5-PP The University of Strathclyde - Digital Health & Care Institute (UK)	458,360
SO 2.1 - Improving SMEs competitiveness policies		**3,428,513**
ATM for SMEs	1-LP Fejér Enterprise Agency (HU)	0
Design 4 Innovation	3-PP KEPA - Business and Cultural Development Centre Thessaloniki (EL)	0
Design 4 Innovation	5-PP Valletta Cultural Agency (CY)	2,540,128
Design 4 Innovation	7-PP Galician Agency of Innovation (ES)	0
RegionArts	4-PP Business and Cultural Development Centre of Central Macedonia (EL)	888,385
SO 3.1 - Improving low-carbon economy policies		**4,240,777**
PASSAGE	1-LP Pas-de-Calais County Council (FR), 2-PP Kent County Council (UK)	0
SMART-MR	10-PP Barcelona Metropolitan Area (ES)	4,240,777
SO 4.1 - Improving natural and cultural heritage policies		**705,492**
CHRISTA	3-PP Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia on behalf of the Region of Central Macedonia (EL)	688,000
HERICOAST	3-PP Castilla y León Regional Government - Regional Ministry of Culture and Tourism (ES)	17,492
SO 4.2 - Improving resource-efficient economy policies		**3,277,337**
COCOON	8-PP Sanitation Cordoba - SADECO (ES)	2,365,005
INTHERWASTE	1-LP Sanitation Córdoba - SADECO (ES)	43,332
TRIS	5-PP Energy Agency for Southeast Sweden (SE)	869,000
Total, all SOs and all policy improvements		**27,605,730**

7.13 Annex XIII – Focus and outcome of the six PLP peer reviews carried out in 2018 /2019

PLP peer review	Issue and policy instrument addressed in the "host region"	Participating "peers" by countries of origin	Main lessons learnt from the peer review (i.e. basis for practical policy recommendations)	Related policy improvements (already achieved or envisaged)
Lille / France (October 2018)	Better implementation of low-carbon economy and energy efficiency measures under the "ERDF-ESF Operational Programme Nord-Pas de Calais"	Seven experts from six other European cities and regions in France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain	• The need to develop the region's benchmark capacity. • Strengthening of communication and capacity building towards the beneficiaries. • Simplification of the administrative rules (i.e. use of the simplified cost options). • Development of more consistent approaches for selecting projects (goal and ambition of the programme considering energy gain monitoring as a key issue)	Achieved: The Managing Authority improved the communication of the 2014-2020 programme (i.e. programme website now includes a more dynamic presentation of the project lifecycles and a text on the procedures; improved information flow and better communication of administrative rules to the beneficiaries). Envisaged: For the period 2021-2027, the programme will consider simplified cost options. It will also propose the use of tools for measuring energy efficiency gains, as the selection system will no longer be based on classification, but on the energetic gain.
Gävleborg / Sweden (January 2019)	Improving the governance for the project "ELVÄG – E16", an ERDF co-funded project on an e-highway in Sandviken.	Experts from the Netherlands (region of Noord-Brabant), Spain (Extremadura) and Germany (Baden-Württemberg).	• Establishing loyalty and co-ownership with the project at the outset. • Ensuring strong and continuous stakeholder governance. • Leading the implementation process successfully (staying focused and proactive, investing in team building, involving the stakeholders, exploit networks). • Understanding all relevant "windows for innovation" (political, economic, societal, technological). • Use of evaluations and peer learning.	Achieved: The peer review was a good add on for the project of the host region, as it provided the tools to start the deployment process more ready and empowered. It also influenced the way the host region works on a day-to-day basis with innovation (i.e. better management and use of the innovation windows of the host region). Moreover, the peer review gave the host new ideas on finding better possibilities to receive funding. Finally, the lessons learnt also encouraged the host to cooperate more closely with the "Swedish Incubators and Science Parks" (SiSP) and the "Swedish Strategical Innovation Platforms" to enhance and support their policy work. Envisaged: New project ideas, since the host region wishes to launch a joint project with the peer regions on

				targeted exchanges on innovative mobility solutions or some steps towards interregional value chains and closer business cooperation.
Eupen / Belgium (May 2019)	Getting more experience on a coordinated future implementation of the "Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan" (SECAP), adopted by 7 municipalities of the German-speaking community of Belgium in early 2019.	Experts from Belgium (West-Vlaamse Intercommunale), Finland (South Ostrobothnia Energy Agency), Italy (Sviluppo Marche) and Germany (Energy Agency Rheinland-Pfalz).	• Developing robust starting points for the implementation (e.g. strong commitment in the region, comprehensive and cross-cutting SECAP that offers flexibility to the partners; timely, active, transparent and inclusive stakeholder involvement, readiness to seek for advice and ideas from outside). • Establishing appropriate the governance structures for the SECAP implementation (i.e. overall and at the municipal levels). • Available support tools for local authorities (i.e. information, shared tools and expertise from the German-speaking community). • Monitoring, data and reporting of information (i.e. exchanges and needs). • Financing of the SECAP measures.	Achieved: Peer review results were sent to all municipalities and stakeholders involved in the elaboration phase of SECAP. The results contributed to the strategic development of the SECAP implementation process and also provided the host region with more insights on these aspects. Envisaged: The host plans the development of best practices specifically as inspiration for the region. The tools discussed by the peers will also be analysed by the German-speaking community for their wider applicability (e.g. inspiration for a management tool developed to improve the collaboration between municipalities, also used beyond energy projects). Envisaged: Also continuous cooperation and exchange with the peers on topics and ideas gained from their approaches is envisaged (also as partner of possible future cooperation projects).
Sud Region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur / France (June 2019)	Tackling difficulties linked to the implementation of the regional policy on "Corporate Social Responsibility" within SMEs and micro-enterprises	Experts from Finland (Lathi University of Applied Sciences), Denmark (North Denmark region), Italy (Politecnico di Torino), and Greece (Region Development Fund of Central Macedonia).	• Improve the governance of Corporate Social Responsibility (e.g. by integrating it in strategic regional policy documents, by cooperating with the regional council across departments; by asking for political support of policy makers; by creating strong regional ecosystem; by anchoring the strategy in daily work etc.). • Raise awareness, knowledge and the profile of the Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.	Overall, the peer review offered the possibility for the host region to step back and reflect on its own mechanism and tools. It also allowed the host region to receive valuable inputs that will be put into practice. Envisaged short and medium term policy improvements are the following: • Improving the Corporate Social Responsibility governance (short term): enlarging the partnership and engaging partner institutions for promoting skills development.

			• Use ESIF for Corporate Social Responsibility and circular economy (e.g. by mainstreaming the strategy in ESIF programming, pilot actions, several types of ESIF projects). • Creating support tools for the Corporate Social Responsibility (e.g. by revising the existing self-assessment tools of the strategy to make them more user-friendly; by training programmes to the mangers of the strategy).	• Strengthening links between the region and the ecosystem (short term): by integrating the strategy into daily practices of companies and workers. • Improving communication internally and across all services (short term). • A new and modified framework of intervention for bringing together regional policy in favour of SMEs in the field of commerce, arts and handcraft from 2020 onwards in coordination with other actors (short term). Revision of the support self-assessment tools and improvement of the external communication strategy will be improved (short term). • Launching a pilot action at one key economic sector out of the seven value chains of the region (medium term). • Better integrating Corporate Social Responsibility into the revised RIS3 and the operational programme for 2021-2027 (medium term).
Sofia / Bulgaria (June 2019)	Improving the future functioning of Centres of Excellence and Centres of Competence, both funded by the ERDF-ESF Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" (SESG) in Bulgaria	Experts from Finland (Kainuu), Belgium (European Liaison Officer Flanders), Lithuania (Ministry of the Economy and Innovation) and the Czech Republic (CEITEC, Brno University of Technology).	• Improving the governance model (e.g. by looking at legal bodies, the managing staff and its profile, the intellectual property rights and ownership, at individual plans for the utilisation of scientific infrastructure). • Better private sector involvement (e.g. in the governance of the different types of centres, voucher mechanisms and financial instruments). • Improved financial models so as for both types of centres to ensure sustainability, (i.e. balancing of economic and non-economic activities, state aid issues and financial models closely linked to governance, infrastructures and key performance indicators).	The lessons learned during the peer review were shared with all beneficiaries under the projects developing and establishing Centres of Excellence and Centres of Competence. The policy recommendations were disseminated to the respective decision makers and also published on the Managing Authority's website. Envisaged: As follow-up actions, the Managing Authority will develop initiatives for ensuring successful implementation and functioning of these centres (i.e. use of good examples on similar centres when planning the future legal structures and management models for the Bulgarian centres). Envisaged: The Managing Authority plans to apply for hosting another peer review. Furthermore, the host wishes to continue the cooperation with the peers in some of the follow-up actions and exchange with the centres of

			• Looking for extra-regional knowledge and interregional cooperation (e.g. links with other regional innovation centres, knowledge transfer, internationalisation and networks, EU funding opportunities, mobility schemes and international advisory boards etc.).	excellence and centres of competence that were represented by the peers.
Berlin / Germany (July 2019)	New options for supporting internationalisation and transnational cooperation within the programme "Berlin Startup Scholarship" and the "Programme for internationalisation" of SMEs, both being parts of the ESF Operational Programme of the Land of Berlin in the period 2014-2020.	Experts from the Netherlands (City of Amsterdam), Italy (FILSE SpA, Genova), Finland (Helsinki-Uusimaa Council) and France (City of Paris).	• An overarching strategy is required that is flexible for start-up needs. • Regions need to be international, too. • Monitoring is necessary. • Regular compilation of incubators' available information and follow up on their activities. • An ecosystem monitoring tool from Helsinki could be shared with the host and other peers. • Use of the existing networks between cities and establishment of a team of experts for tailored start-up support. • Amsterdam's trade developers as a good practice for added value in international trips and sector-based international offices. • Local welcome culture for international newcomers.	The peer review has been of added value for the host and a number of recommendations will be used for adjusting the programmes in Berlin. The envisaged follow up measures are the following: • Adaptation of project funding to SMEs and start-ups, by providing tailor made support. • Provision of international trips. • Increasing the likelihood for start-ups to apply through professional support. • Development of complementarities between the programmes and close cooperation with managing and audit authorities. In addition, the peer review offered some advice for networking activities that will also be taken into account (e.g. sustainability of networks and their lasting impact on the target group; further funding of a network partner if the service was of value, or otherwise allocation of network projects based on strong selection criteria; monitoring of network activities and use of Interreg expertise on evaluation for this).

7.14 Annex XIV – Location of achieved policy changes in Cohesion Policy regions

Geographic repartition of policy changes

125
155
25

■ Less developed regions   ■ In transition regions   ■ More developed regions

Proportion of each type of region within each specific objective

■ % of less developed regions   ■ % of in transition regions
■ % of more developed regions
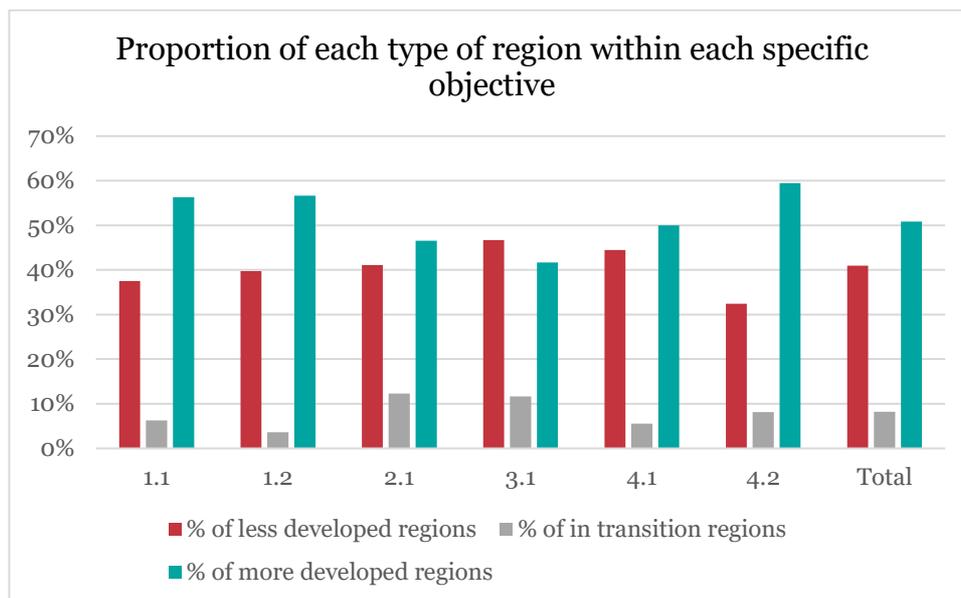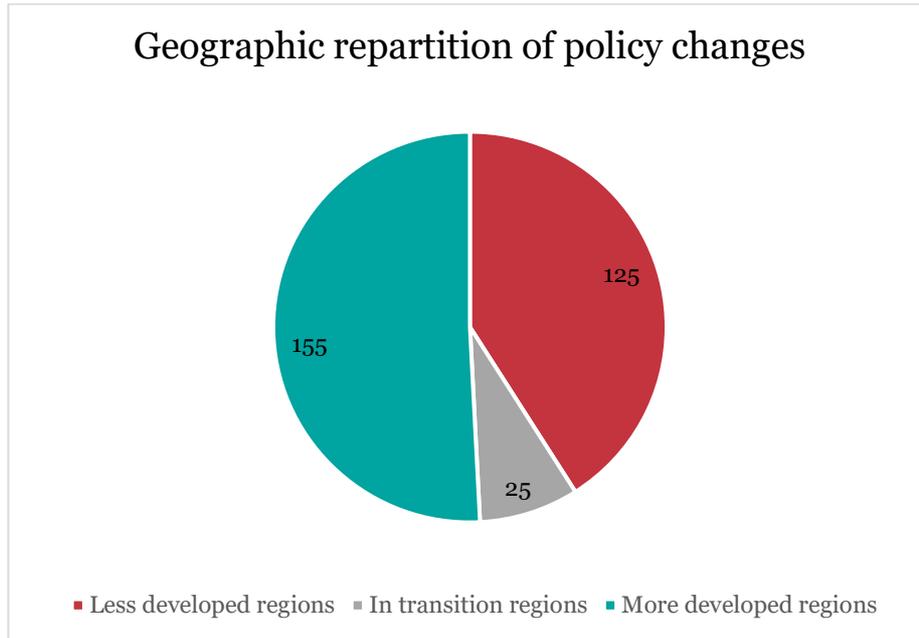
Source: Interreg Europe Excel file "Geographic repartition of policy changes-4-05"

7.15 Annex XV - Analysis of the task 3 online survey to the Monitoring Committee

A survey to MC members collected views on the programme's implementation and suggestions for possible future improvements for the Interreg Europe programmes. The survey ran from 14 May until 4 June and collected views from 32 MC members, from at least 20 different partner states, providing a variety of different views and hence relevant information for the operational evaluation.

Questions have been asked on the overall considerations of the programme, overall steering of the programme, project implementation, policy learning platforms and the programme communication strategy. Although not all respondents answered each question. The following presents the analysis of the survey by section and question.

Overall considerations on the programme

Interreg Europe is more frequent an important dossier for MC members (Figure 2) than in the eyes of their hierarchy (Figure 1).

18 out of 32 respondents acknowledge that Interreg Europe is an important dossier and only one respondent mentions that it is the least important dossier in the eyes of their hierarchy (Figure 1). The hierarchies of most MC members appreciate thus the task to perform for Interreg Europe. One respondent specifies that Interreg Europe demands less efforts compared to other Interreg programmes and mainstream cohesion policy programmes that are managed from the same office: "Interreg Europe is anyway well managed".

Figure 1   Importance of Interreg Europe in the organisation
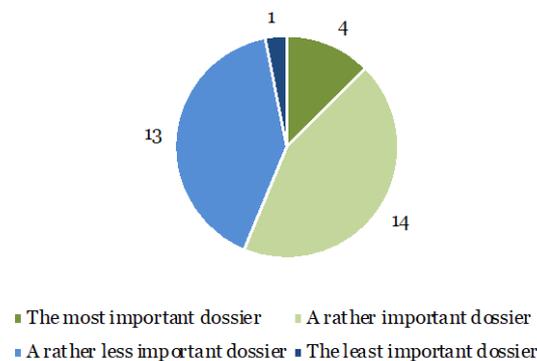
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=32)

MC members appreciate working Interreg Europe. 20 out of 31 respondents consider Interreg Europe as one of their favourite dossiers (Figure 2). One respondent specified that it is attached to the dossier, and "wished it could work more on this dossier". Also among the respondents that appreciate this dossier slightly less. like working on task for the programme. One respondent specifies its answer: "it is just one of the many dossiers but I'm still attached to this one".

Figure 2   *Personal importance of Interreg Europe*

Compared to the dossiers / files you are in charge of, how attached are
you personally to Interreg Europe?

- Interreg Europe is "my baby"
- I am attached to this dossier
- It is one of my favorite dossiers
- It is just one of many dossiers I am charge of
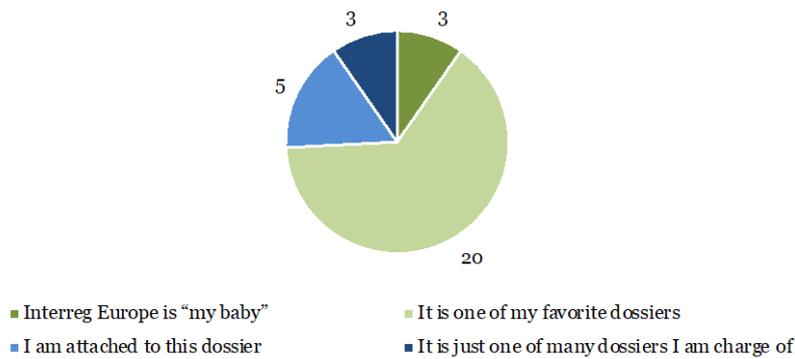
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=31)

MC members are generally satisfied with their sense of ownership over programme development and implementation (Figure 3). 10 out of 31 respondents are very satisfied and 20 respondents are rather satisfied. Few respondents provided some points for improvements in the comment section of the questionnaire. One respondent expressed the need for more time. Another respondent proposes a more active involvement for dissemination and engagement in the respective countries. Another respondent suggests more ownership for strategic decisions.

Figure 3   *Level of satisfaction towards sense of ownership over programme development and implementation*

As a MC member, how satisfied are you with your sense of ownership
over the programme development and implementation?

- Very satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied
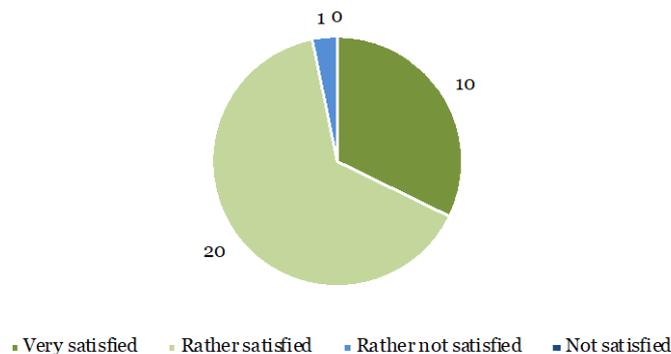
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=31)

13 respondents provided ideas on other measures that the programme could take strengthen the sense of ownership among MC members and to strengthen the programme's strategic importance. The answers can be summarised as follows:

- 6 answers refer to communication related suggestions; e.g. "tailored communications", "direct communication to decision makers", stimulation of more discussion in meeting e.g. through interactive tools or discussion rounds in smaller groups", "more in-depth discussions on project results" ,and "more and timely information on events in respective countries".

- 4 answers refer to relations with other ESIF programmes; e.g. "better envisage the complementary use of EU funding instruments in order to support regional/national and

European strategies", "use territorial evidence from ESPON to support relevance of strategic partnerships or embed project results", "stronger involvement of other programme authorities and making them more aware on the added value of Interreg Europe".

- Another respondent proposes to "highlighting the strong support and cooperation between member states at all levels, project and programme, i.e. suggested by the high sense of ownership to the programme".

Respondents are generally rather satisfied with the involvement of the beneficiaries in programme activities (Figure 4). 26 out of 30 respondents assess this involvement as rather satisfied. The comments don't provide any further justification to the answers provided.

Figure 4   *Level of satisfaction on community involvement*

How satisfied are you with the level involvement of the community
(e.g. beneficiaries) in what the programme is doing?

2   0   2

26

▪ Very satisfied   ▪ Rather satisfied   ▪ Rather not satisfied   ▪ Not satisfied
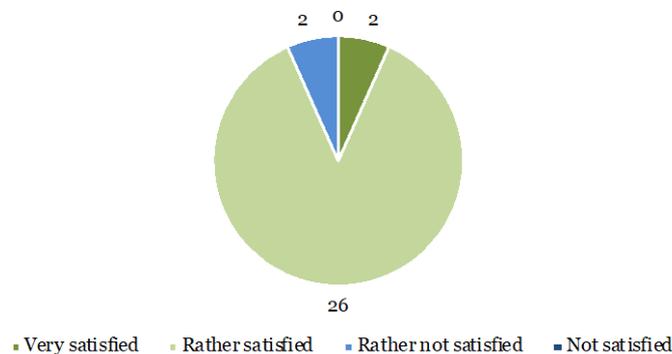
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

Overall steering of the programme

MC members are satisfied with the overall steering of the programme. 17 out of 30 respondents is very satisfied with the level of information on programme management and decision, 18 out of 29 is very satisfied with the level of information on financial progress. None of the respondents indicated to be unsatisfied (Figure 5).

Only few points for improvement for the information provision for the steering of the programme are provided. A respondent suggests "stronger reactivity to what is really needed in Europe's regions via targeted calls enhancing the effectiveness of the programme". Another respondent suggests clearer review of the amount of material that is sent to MC members at once. Also, the JS should remain clear about proposed conclusions, alternative options and consequences".

Figure 5   Level of satisfaction on information on management decisions and financial progress

How satisfied are you with the level of information related to the programme's steering in relation to **programme management and decsisions**

How satisfied are you with the level of information related to the programme's steering in relation to **financial progress**

▪ Very satisfied   ▪ Rather satisfied   ▪ Rather not satisfied   ▪ Not satisfied   ▪ Very satisfied   ▪ Rather satisfied   ▪ Rather not satisfied   ▪ Not satisfied
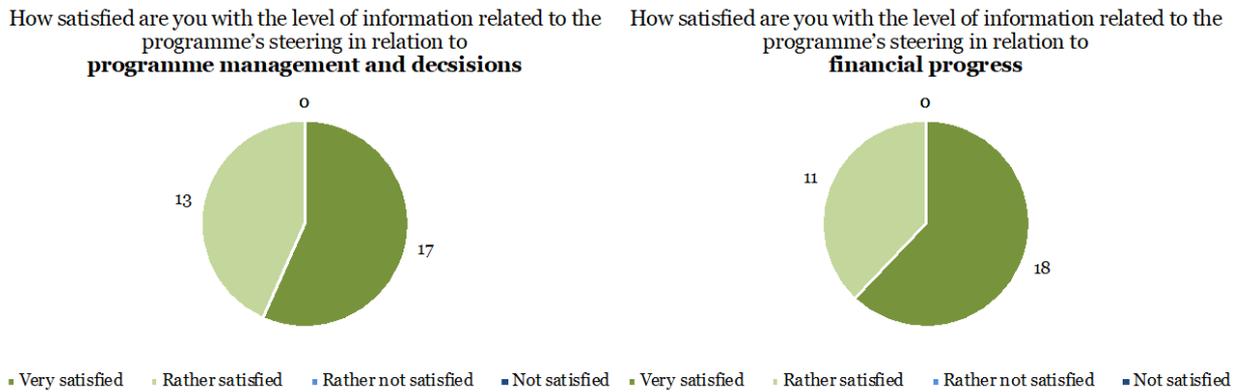
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

22 out of 30 respondents do not see a need for substantial changes in the programme management. 4 respondents specified their answer:

- "Try, within the EU-rules given, to be as lean and mean as possible, and act towards benificiaries on high trust, to diminish the admin burden."

- "Increase facilitation of exchange between MC members in order to know the most recent regional/national priorities and to understand better strategic cooperation potentials for example as preparation for targeted calls."

- "The JS structure should be more flexible. Multitasking system should be applied, e.g. staff dealing with communication should also deal with e.g. monitoring, assessment. Each staff member should have a broad knowledge of projects and programme, and should not be focused solely on one or two activities."

- "Strengthen a culture of open and maybe provocative discussion in the MC about different options for decision."

The 8 respondents that see a need for substantial changes did not specify their answer.

14 respondents see a need to change the level of activity of national contact points (

Table 1). 13 of which would see a need for more activities and 1 respondent that sees a need to decrease the level of activities of national contact points. The latter argues that centralised activities from the JS should be sufficient for the overall steering of the programme. Other respondents justify a need for expending activities of national contact points by "providing more funds for (targeted) seminars to beneficiaries", "proposing a functioning network of contact points with clear roles and tasks similar to the Interreg NWE programme", "proposing more support for communication activities", "more engagement with projects to facilitate dissemination of project results".

The other 14 respondents assume the level of activity of national contact points sufficient and do not see a need for change. These respondents did not justify their answers.

Table 1   Perceived need for change of activity levels of national contact points

Should the level of activity of national contact points be changed?

yes, it should be increased	13
yes, it should be decreased	1
No, it should stay the same	14

Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=28)

Project implementation

MC members are rather satisfied with the information provision on projects (Figure 6) and quality of the projects (Figure 7).

MC members acknowledge that the information on project and pilot actions is often too much or too detailed to review completely. Few suggestions to improve this are provided, for example

- "by providing a link to a database and leaving the responsibility to review projects to members",

- "limit communication from JS to policy changes relevant to instruments addressed by the partners",

- "share summaries rather than complete overviews",

- "focus the communication on open issues regarding the projects in implementation as well as the reasons for unsuccessful pilot actions"

- Structure the information on pilot actions for example according to project objectives from phase 1".

Figure 6　　　　　*Level of satisfaction on the information on project implementation and approvals of pilot actions*

How satisfied are you with the level of information about the Interreg Europe projects to perform your tasks as MC member, when it comes to **project implementation**

How satisfied are you with the level of information about the Interreg Europe projects to perform your tasks as MC member, when it comes to **approval of pilot actions under phase 2**

- Yes, fully satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied

- Yes, fully satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied
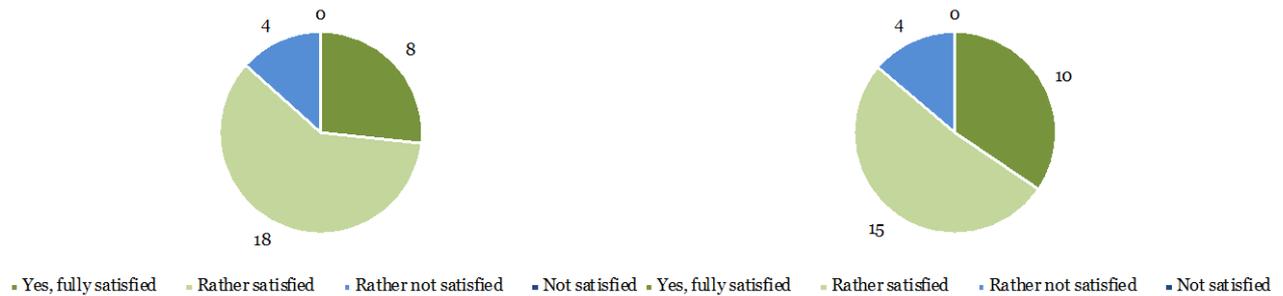
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

22 out of 30 respondents are rather satisfied with the quality of Interreg Europe projects. Respondents specify that the high number of projects make it hard to keep track of the actual implementation of the projects. It is thus hard to judge on the projects' quality after the decision has been made to award the project. One respondent specifies that it would like to see more project entering phase 2 to get more concrete outputs. Another respondent would like to discuss the impact of the project in the MC members' territories more in the MC. A respondent that is very satisfied specifies that it appreciates the large variety of Interreg projects.

Figure 7　　　　　*Level of satisfaction of the quality of Interreg Europe projects*

How satisfied are you with the quality of projects funded by the programme?

- Yes, fully satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied
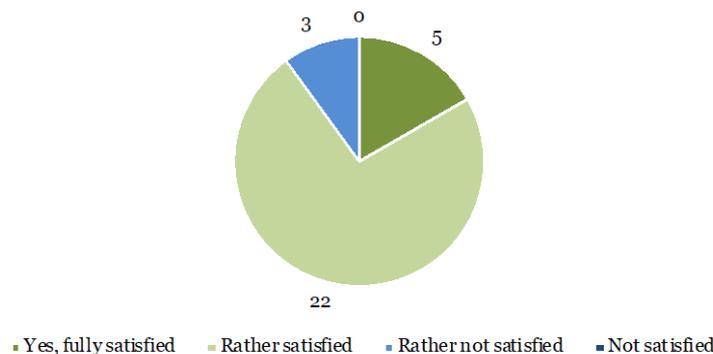
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

iDB is largely appreciated as tool for steering and managing the programme. 26 respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 2 respondents disagree. 1 of these 2 respondents mentions that it has too limited knowledge to answer the question as it is only familiar with the MC part of iDB.

Policy Learning Platform

MC members have diverse opinions on policy learning platforms. The majority of respondents perceive the level of information as rather satisfied, 8 respondents perceive it as rather not satisfied and 4 respondents perceive it as fully satisfied (Figure 8). Respondents specify their answers expressing the policy learning platforms are rather complex and sometime too technical to quickly grasp the main points. Moreover, information on results or conclusions is not easily found or accessible. Two respondents specify a need for clearer relation to other ESIF managing authorities.

Figure 8   *Level of satisfaction of information on policy learning platforms*

How satisfied are you with the level of information related to the Policy Learning Platform implementation and performance to perform your tasks as member of the Monitoring Committee?

- Yes, fully satisfied
- Rather satisfied
- Rather not satisfied
- Not satisfied
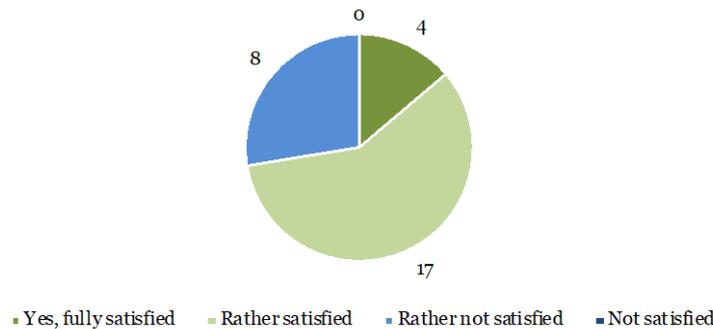
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=29)

MC members assess policy learning platforms important for both community-based and expert based learning. Slightly more respondents assess community-based learning as more important (Figure 9). Respondents specify their answers mentioning that "the programme is all about learning that bench-marking and good practices facilitate learning"; and that "both are necessary and important - first networking among the participants followed by consultation with experts".

Figure 9   *Level of importance of policy learning platforms for community based and expert based learning*

The Policy Learning Platform builds on different sources of learning. Please rate the importance you give to the following source of learning for the PLP activities community based

The Policy Learning Platform builds on different sources of learning. Please rate the importance you give to the following source of learning for the PLP activities expert based

- Very important
- Rather important
- Rather not important
- Not important
- Very important
- Rather important
- Rather not important
- Not important
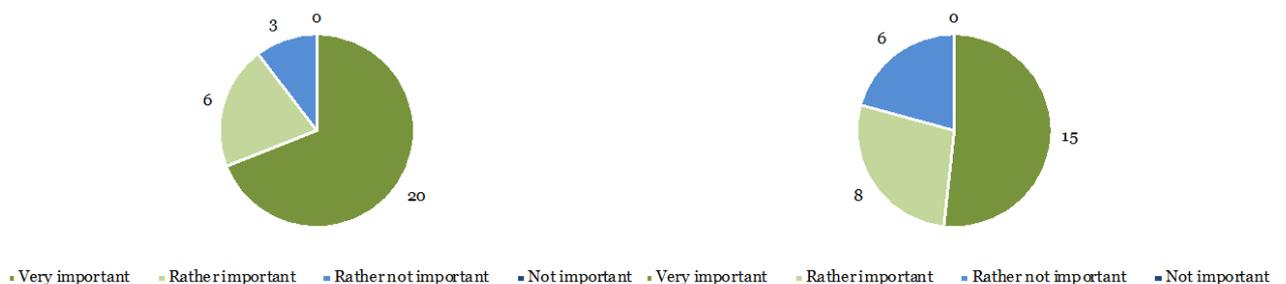
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=29)

MC members have diverse opinions on the expected results and achievements of policy learning platforms (Figure 10). 16 out of 27 respondents perceive the achievements rather in line with the expectations, 8 respondents perceive the achievement rather not being in line with the expectations. Some respondents specify their answers;

- "Earlier projects (call 1 and 2) could not benefit fully from platform"

- "The late development of the platforms made certain outputs too general (e.g. policy briefs) especially for the beneficiaries of the programme"

- "The good practice database should be thoroughly checked by the experts (if really good practices)"

- "I would have expected a few more activities to reach out to a wider audience."

Figure 10   *Level to which policy learning platform achievement respond to expectations*

Are the Policy Learning Platform activities and achievements in line with your expectations?

1 2

8

16

■ Yes, fully in line with my expectations ■ Rather in line with my expectations
■ Rather not in line with my expectations ■ Not in line with my expectations
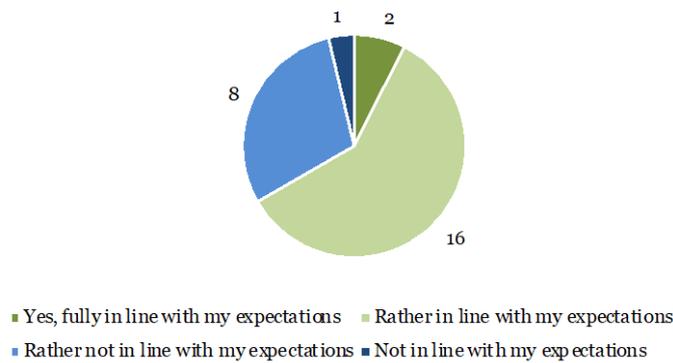
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=27)

Programme communication strategy

MC members agree with the 4 proposed objectives for future communications activities (Figure 11). Respondents are most positive on the objective to increase access to good practices, followed by raising awareness on the programme in general, on potential project leaders and partners on the programme and on the support provided by the programme and lastly to raise awareness on defined list of 'actors of regional relevance' of the policy learning platform's existence. One respondent specifies a "no" regarding the latter object: "A finally defined and constantly updated list of actors of regional relevance is not achievable."

Other suggestions provided by respondents include

- "raising awareness for more targeted audiences",

- "target the decision-makers and heads of the MAs and involve them more in its activities raise awareness about PLP services, achieved project results to demonstrate a positive impact of the programme on policies and in order to foster the capitalisation of the project results".

Figure 11   *possible objectives for communication activities in the future*

Do you think that programme communication activities should serve the following objectives also in the future?

	Yes	No
Increase of the access to good practices	30	
Raise awareness about defined list of 'actors of regional relevance' of the policy learning…	23	7
Raise awareness about potential project leaders and partners on the programme and on the…	26	4
Raise awareness on the programme in general	27	3

■ Yes ■ No
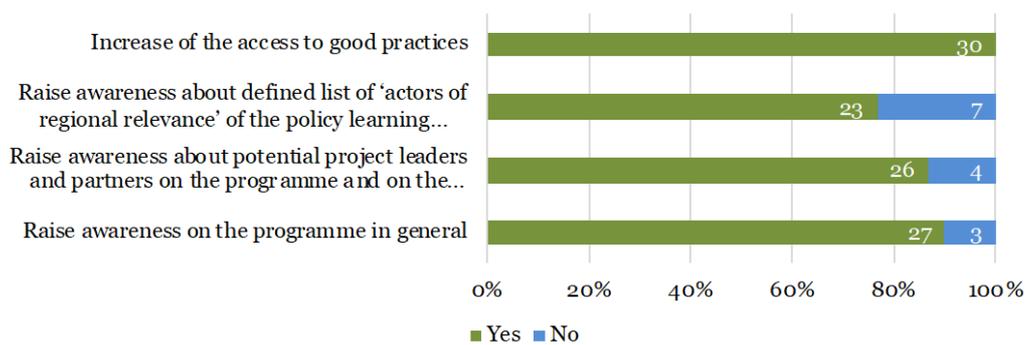
Source: own elaboration based on a survey to MC members (n=30)

MC members agree largely to use the above objectives in the future to support exchange of experience and good practices among regional players, as well as to facilitate EU-wide policy

learning and capitalisation of good practices. In the first case 29 out of 30 respondents agree. In the second case 28 out of 29 respondents agree. No further justifications have been provided to this question.

All respondents (29/29) think that the programme's communication tools developed during the present period (e.g. on-line tools, hosting projects website) should be kept for the future. Few respondents specify their answers;

- "Communication tools should be mixed with vis à vis meetings"

- "Yet, but depending on the level of user-satisfaction"

- "Hosting the project websites should be maintained to allow project to optimise their budgets for content related activities"

Several suggestions have been provided to **strengthen the strategic reputation of the programme, especially among key decision makers shaping EU regional policy**. Answers have been structured along key communication questions; What, For who (target group), How?

What?

- "Highlighting the policies that have been influenced in the region due to Interreg Europe projects, by what activities and by whom"

- "Communicate on real life issues rather than technicalities"

- "Project results that are of benefit for the citizens"

- "The spreading of concrete, good and useful results gained in the regional policy contest trough interregional cooperation, is the best way to increase the reputation of the programme, that is already high, also thanks to the efficiency of the JS"

For who?

- "Targeted presentations/conferences for key decision makers on various policy levels"

- "Address decision makers that are directly involved in projects"

How?

- "invite decision makers to more events so that they can develop a sense of ownership"

- "Communicate in short, simple messages"

- "info and dissemination sessions for relevant EP committees and EC services"

- "national seminars organised by the joint secretariat to promote programme possibilities to mainstream MAs, policy makers"

- "Tailor-made events by PLPs/programme for the key decision makers on a certain topic in order to help the decision makers to improve policies and at the same time to promote the programme (and the PLP services)"

7.16 Annex XVI – Analysis of the task 3 online survey on programme support to projects

An online survey collected more information on the perceptions and experience of project leaders with Interreg Europe's. The survey ran from 12 March until 10 April and collected answers from 209 project lead partners, an overall response rate of 81%.

Only small differences in the overall response rate by call after which projects received funding can be observed. The response rate of call 3 projects was slightly lower (63.3%) compared to the response rates of project lead partners from the other calls.

Not all respondents replied to each question, hence the response rate per question are mention under the graphs (n=xx)

Response rate by call
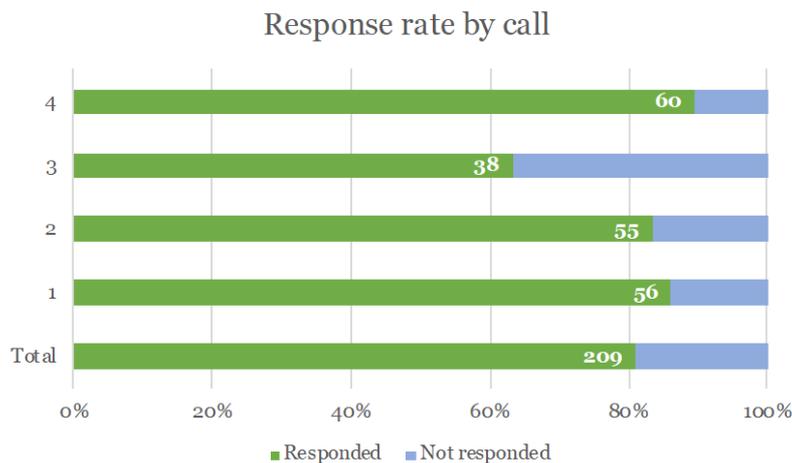
(1) Programme support to project generation

Programme support to project generation refers to all processes designed and implemented by the programme to attract potential applicants and to support the development of relevant project ideas.

How efficient and effective is the programme support for beneficiaries during project generation?

Project lead partners are overall satisfied with the support provided during the project application phase. 65 % of the project lead partners acknowledge to have received to support that they needed for their project application. Another 32% of the project partners acknowledge to have received to a large degree the support that the needed. Project leader partners from call 2 projects indicated relatively more often to have received to a large degree the support that they would have needed. Only 5 project lead partners were partially foreseen in their needs for project application. 2 of these project partners replied to call 1, 2 projects to call 3 and 1 project to call 4.

Figure 12   *Overall satisfaction with programme support for project applicants by call*

Did you receive the support you needed (from the Interreg Europe Programme) for your project application?
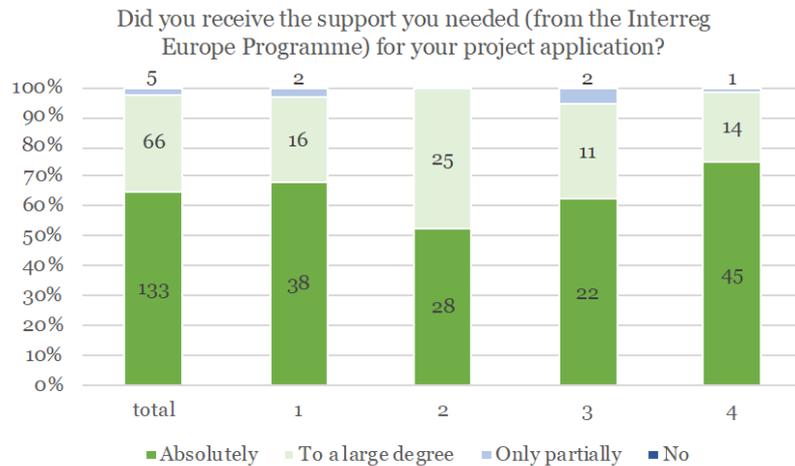
Source: Online survey of project lead partners (n=204)

The application pack was generally perceived as clear. 70% of the respondents assess the application pack as very clear and 29.5% as somewhat clear. These percentages are similar to the outcomes of the previous survey when 69.4% of the respondents indicated very clear documents and information and 30.5% somewhat clear documents and information. Only 1 respondent representing a call 1 project perceived the application pack as rather not clear.

Small differences can be observed by call. Applicants to call 2 indicated relatively more often that the information was somewhat clear rather than very clear. The justifications provide a few more examples of differences by call:

- Applicants to call 1 indicating that the application was somewhat clear refer for example to changes procedures and requirements by the programme, partly as result of ongoing finalisation of the application package.

- Applicants of the other calls (2, 3 and 4) refer to general difficulties, for example in relation to indicators.

- Applicants of the other calls (2, 3 and 4) refer to length of the manual and its general wealth of information. One respondent suggests to add a search function to allow quicker browsing through the document in search of relevant information.

Figure 2   Perception of the clarity of the application pack (updated 2020)

Were the programme documents and information provided in the call clear?
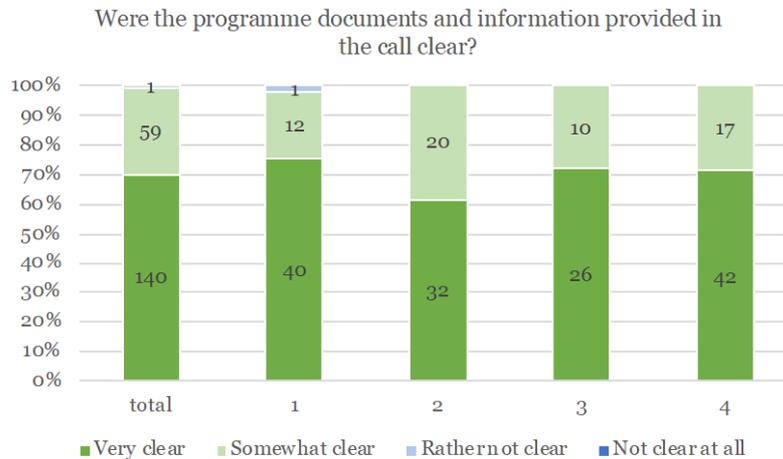
Source: Survey of lead partners (n=200)

call	answer	justification
1	Somewhat clear	1st call --> During project preparation, the Programme Manual changed and some adjustments to the Application were necessary to follow the new rules.
1	Somewhat clear	We were preparing for the first call for proposals of the IE. Due to belated approval of the EP on the programme, most of materials were not ready. Therefore, we had to keep up with the latest programme guideline and template. It was challenging but the situation is understandable.
1	Somewhat clear	Projects from the first call had some difficulties to properly understand the policy instrument issue
1	Somewhat clear	They were being improved (PM, annexes as Action plan etc.) while ongoing the calls.
1	Somewhat clear	Again - referring to the second application - the requirements of the programme are clear, but the evaluators haven't follow the requirements. E.g. letters of support were (as I was told later by one of the JS staff) not taken as relevant. The second comment was that the partnership doesn't reflect the EU perspective (1 UK, 1 Spanish, 1 Italian, 2 Slovenian, 1 Austrian and 1 Polish partner) and that the project would more fit to Med Programme. For the next call the JS has made more strict requirements for the partnership and we would already meet the requirements!
1	Somewhat clear	The initial instructions as to what a RAP was were not sufficiently clear for us to develop them in accordance to the requirements. This resulted in a very long and demanding procedure for revision that could have been avoided had these documents been clearer
1	Very clear	Some problems emerged concerning the Action Plan interpretation
2	Somewhat clear	Maybe provide more specifications and clues about the content of the potential projects expected for each call
2	Very clear	No further suggestions
2	Somewhat clear	It was 4 years ago so hard to remember - now that I know the programme the policy objectives seem very clear and straightforward but at the time it seemed VERY complicated. Eligible policies were perhaps the most difficult bit.
2	Somewhat clear	Indicators and what policy improvement exactly means was not completely clear
2	Somewhat clear	It was challenging to understand the how the programme was set up in terms of the policy instruments and ERDF.
3	Somewhat clear	The extensive programme manual is too large for engaging in an application. Only if substantial time is available and if there are other institutional experiences with earlier applications, it can be worthwhile to consider an application
3	Somewhat clear	the Excel list with structural funds for Portugal was not correct
3	Somewhat clear	Indicators, interpretation of indicators always offer room for development.
3	Somewhat clear	additional information sometimes needed
3	Very clear	Make it even easier to use a "search" tool in the Program Manual. The access to other possible and good projects should be easier to find in the process of making a good partnership.
4	Somewhat clear	The application form sections could be simplified
4	Somewhat clear	It is a somewhat intricate application form, but what is most difficult to understand is the part on the policy instruments. We definitely needed experts to support us in completing this part of the application form.
4	Somewhat clear	The end of the programme period did make the situation different and it could have been explained better/ more in detail
4	Somewhat clear	We would suggest giving a clearer explanation on what kind of improvements can be considered as policy change.
4	Somewhat clear	More examples of activities

Perception of the clarity of the application pack (OLD, just as reference)

Are the programme documents and information provided in the call clear?
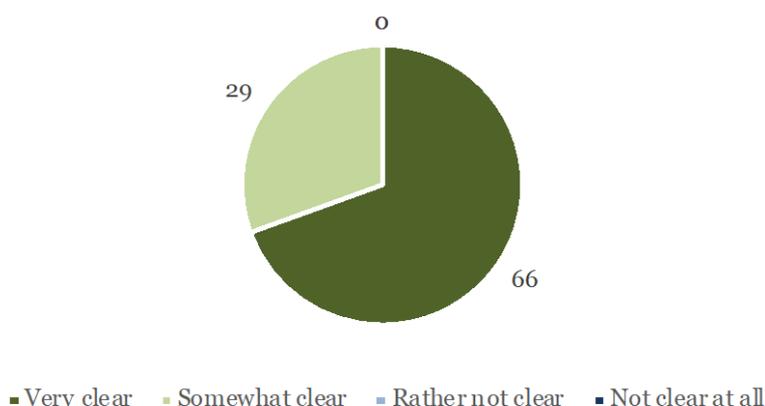
Source: Survey of lead partners

Are the supporting tools (e.g. webinars, online self-assessment tool, partner search tool, project idea feedback) sufficient and appropriate to generate good quality applications?

The overall appreciation of the different support tools is similar as in 2018. Similar shares of respondents valued the different tools as very useful, somewhat useful, rather not useful or not useful at all. The only difference that can be observed concerns the share of respondents that indicated "N/A" for the online self-assessment tool, suggesting that fewer project lead partner are familiar or have used this tool.

Support tools during the application are generally well perceived by the project lead partners. In particular the programme documents and support provided by the JS is well received. 76.1% of the survey respondents assess the programme documents as very useful and another 20.4% assesses it as somewhat useful. 74.8 % of the respondents assess JS assistance as very useful and another 16.8% assess it as somewhat useful.

Information events are slightly less appreciated. 57.1% of the respondents assess this type of support as very useful and 34.2% assess this type of support as somewhat useful. 6 respondents (3.1%) assess this type of support as rather not useful. The opportunity to discuss queries face-to-face during these events is appreciated. A respondent suggest that it could become even more useful when knowing the other participants in advance. Respondents from call 1 and 4 projects indicated more frequent to information events as very useful compared to respondents from call 2 and 3 projects.

Webinars are similarly appreciated as information events. 52.5% of the respondents assess this type of support as very useful and 32.2% assess this type of support as somewhat useful. 9 respondents (4.5%) assess this type of support as rather not useful. A respondent specified that more information about reporting on policy developments and changes would have been appreciated during the webinar.

Project idea feedback is perceived as less useful compared to the previous mentioned tools. 37.3% of the respondent assess the support as very useful, 37.8% as somewhat useful and 7% of the respondents assessed it as rather not useful. 2 respondents were assessed the support as not useful at, one from a call 1 project and one from a call 4 project. One respondent specified that the feedback provided was incoherent with the final evaluation of the project creating confusion.

26.9% of the respondents assess partner search support as very useful, 47.8% as somewhat useful, 12.9% as rather not useful and 1 respondent indicated to find the support not useful at all. A respondent indicated that the partner search tool isn't specific enough. Due to an overrepresentation of consultants in the tool who seem to look for any type of project work. This

increases the time it takes a long time to find any relevant partners. Comparing the survey findings by call suggest an improvement of the tool over time. The share of respondents that appreciated the tool as "very useful" increased between call 1, 2 and 3 and was for call 4 slightly lower than for call 3. At the same time the share of respondents that assess the support as rather not useful decreased from between call 2, 3 and 4.

The online self-assessment tool is least appreciated with only 19% of the respondents assess this type of support as very useful. It should however be noted that a higher share of respondents indicated "n/A" for this tool. Suggesting that this tool is less frequently used, or respondents are less familiar with this tool.

Figure 3   *Overall satisfaction with programme support tools for project applicants (2020 update)*

How useful do you assess the following supporting tools for the preparation of project application?
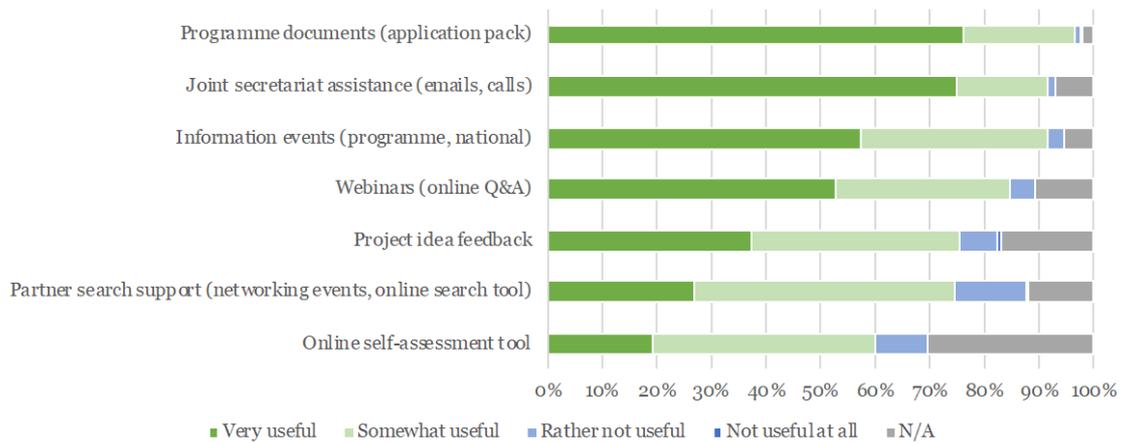
Source: Online survey of project lead partners (n=202)

Highlighted cells refer to tool specific justifications…

call	Programme documents	Joint secretariat assistance	Information events	Partner search support	Project idea feedback	Webinars (online Q&A)	Online self-assessment tool	Justification
1	Very useful	N/A	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	The National Contact Points could offer an added value even in the preparation phase
1	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Very useful	N/A	organise meeting among lead partners in a same country as it has been done in France to exchange experience on management and communication issues
1	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	N/A	BID-REX is a 1st call IE project, and the information was very useful but during the preparation some programme requirements changed and it was necessary to make important adjustments in our project definition what means that it was necessary to repeat part of the work already done. This example occurred in other aspects, and it can be perceived checking the number of versions of the Programme Manual (each version means a new change which affects projects development). We understand as we are from the 1st call, but sometimes uncertainty and changes during project development difficulted us correct development of some tasks in terms of calendar and planning.
1	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	There are many projects already approved so each time is more difficult to find the innovation character. Some indications on how to meet this requirement that could be very useful
1	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	N/A	Very useful	N/A	Rather not useful	The support was perfect. Only the online assessment tool was not useful for me as somewhat experienced participant of previous programme. I am not able to assess the tool for the newcomers/
1	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Very useful	N/A	N/A	The definition of "policy instrument" could have been clearer from the beginning.
1	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	The items rated with "somehow useful" have not been much used
1	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	Rather not useful	Not useful at all	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Partner search support might not be successful at all
1	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	More Skype calls
1	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	As newcomer in the project (started in 2018) sometimes it was difficult to understand the methods, way of cooperation, goals etc.
1	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Rather not useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Project idea feedback would be a useful tool if taken seriously. I got a positive response on the idea in one of the calls, but than some concretely opposite statements in the evaluation phase.
2	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Joint Secretariat Assistant should be better prepared for helping, not only checking and controlling
2	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	The partner search tool isn't specific enough. Too many consultants are on it looking for any type of project work. It takes a long time to find any relevant partners
2	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	N/A	more workshops for LPs, not on-line
2	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	No, in particular the JS assistance was very disposal, reactive and useful
2	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Rather not useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	The quality of national policy guidance was extremely poor, the national contact point was not aware of what LEADER was and couldn't advise if it was an eligible policy

call	Programme documents	Joint secretariat assistance	Information events	Partner search support	Project idea feedback	Webinars (online Q&A)	Online self-assessment tool	Justification
2	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Indicators and what policy improvement exactly means was not completely clear
2	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	My colleagues who worked on the project application have left the TCPA so I am only going off what they have told me, hence the n/as!
3	Somewhat useful	Very useful		Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Rather not useful	Somewhat useful	As the Lead Partners does not usually design the project, there are some documents or general methodologies that are repeated from one project to another one, which could be provided to the partners removing the specific data. That way, the partners would know what product are going to contract or even do it by themselves if there administrative difficulties for the contracting.
3	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Clear instructions to European regions on their Policy instruments - being Structural Funds or not. Our first application was not approved due to a mistake on the Interreg Europe website regarding the Policy Instruments under Structural Funds for Portugal. This caused a year delay and a resubmission with all extra costs.
3	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	Answers based upon input of my predecessor in the role of project manager
3	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Joint Secretariat direct feedback through present skype conf was of greatest help.
3	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	N/A	a lot of support provided but a rather complex procedure
3	Very useful	Somewhat useful	N/A	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	The national contact (NO) were of high value for the project development
3	N/A	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	My answers are not very relevant because I was not in the company during the preparation of the project application; but as I'm used to work very well with the JS, I suppose my answers can be taken into account.
3	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Keep and strengthen the round tables of possible project ideas (as in Malta)
4	Very useful	N/A	Very useful	Rather not useful	Not useful at all	Very useful	N/A	Improve match-making process especially for Creative and Cultural Industries
4	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	I'm coming from admin side of activities, just want to acknowledge the continuous support received from the JS desk officers and programme packs etc.
4	Very useful	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not really, tools are indeed very useful already
4	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Very useful	N/A	N/A	Somewhat useful	N/A	At the webinars we would like to hear a more about reporting policy developments and changes.
4	Very useful	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Rather not useful	Rather not useful	Very useful	N/A	At networking events a networking app would be useful to know what projects are involved.

(2) Assessment

The assessment phase is one of the most sensitive in the programme life cycle. The process leading to selecting quality projects needs to combine accuracy, transparency and timely delivery, in the context of a heavy workload due to many applications. The following paragraphs analyse the assessment process in Interreg Europe.

How efficient and effective is the assessment of applications? Is the assessment process leading to selecting good quality projects?

Project lead partners are generally satisfied with the timeframe that is needed to receive an answer on their project application (Figure 4). 46% of the respondents indicated that the time was very reasonable and 50.8% of the respondents indicated somewhat reasonable timeframe. This implies similar shares of adequate timeframes for project approval as found in the 2018 survey.

Respondents indicated that the timeframe is long (6-9 months), but in most cases this was foreseen. Only 13 respondents indicated the timeframe was not reasonable, of which 5 from call 3, 3 from calls 1 and 4 each and 2 respondents from call 2 projects. Other significant differences by call could not be observed.

Figure 4   Perception on the timeframe for approval (2020 update)

To what degree did you perceive the timeframe within which you received the approval notification as reasonable?

■ Very reasonable   ■ Somewhat reasonable   ■ Rather not reasonable
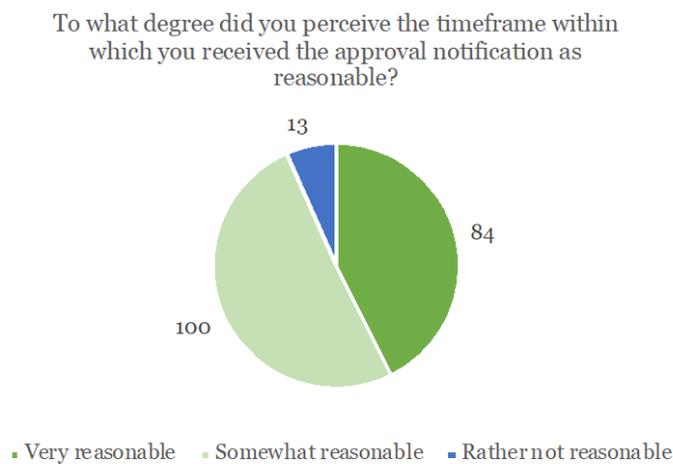
Source: Survey of lead partners (n=197)

Call	answer	Justification
1	Rather not reasonable	Nine months is a long time to wait but this depends on internal management and staff availability so this is outside our knowledge
1	Somewhat reasonable	Everyone would like to have the decision sooner. However the information provided within the pack was clear on the length of the process.
1	Rather not reasonable	We already started the preparation of the iEER in spring 2015 and submitted it in June 2015, received final approval of the funding decision in early 2016. However, the level of scrutiny and conditions to fulfil was somehow time-consuming.
1	Somewhat reasonable	It took over 6 months, but this was communicated in the fore field and no surprise.
1	Somewhat reasonable	Actually, from the application to the notification, clarification, modification and final approbation and start it took quite 1 year. In one year most things could change. We think that the timeframe should be reduced considerably
1	Somewhat reasonable	As far as I remember, there was a delay between the expected time for communication of approval and the final time. This generates uncertainty with regards to the process
1	Rather not reasonable	This time frame doesn't consider the project start date put in the proposal. the start date of PJ and the overall all project duration should be scheduled and planned once the project's got the approval and the Subsidy contract is officially signed
2	Somewhat reasonable	The length of the process for the proposal's approval is considered a very long one (around 7-8 months in some cases). Due to this fact, even the initial conditions under which the proposals are presented could change. For avoiding this point, the evaluation, assessment and approval process should be become shorter.

2	Somewhat reasonable	6 months minimum is rather long to wait for the approval notification. The main problem is that there are discrepancies between what we may wrote and what we really be implemented. However, the JS is fully aware of this and is always trying to accommodate.
2	Somewhat reasonable	I was not involved in the project at the time of the selection procedure so I cannot give a very detailed input in this regard, only feedback from my colleagues.
3	Somewhat reasonable	I think this notification should be adjusting a bit more to the budget cycle of the Organization (especially the administration). There is a lot organization that had to wait the next exercise to hire the staff for the project, and some contract only can be awarded the following year after approval....
3	Somewhat reasonable	we understand that review of proposals take time
3	Somewhat reasonable	This is always a struggle; each Interreg program has its own habits in this.
3	Somewhat reasonable	It was within the expected timetable although in the future a shorter time span would be appreciated
3	Rather not reasonable	9 months is too long
3	Rather not reasonable	The timeframe were to long regarding waiting for approval, and the time to start with the activities, as a result, were too short. Hectic to start with the activities.
3	Rather not reasonable	The selection process timeframe could be shortened.
4	Somewhat reasonable	It took a little longer than expected, but almost 1 year is a long time. After this time it takes a little more effort to reinitiate the topic, especially amongst the consortium partners. And August as a month for starting a project is suboptimal.
4	Rather not reasonable	Too long from deadline of application till approval of notification
4	Somewhat reasonable	It took quite long to get the information if the project was approved
4	Somewhat reasonable	It will be appreciated to shorten the time of evaluation to max 6 months
4	Somewhat reasonable	We are very aware of the time need for concluding the procedure any measure that could seed it up would be great.
4	Rather not reasonable	Our direct contacts answered always very quick but we had to wait a long time for the approval

Is the project assessment and selection process sound, transparent and fair?

Project lead partners assess the project assessments as fair and transparent (Figure 5). Only 5 project lead partners assess the process as not fair and 5 respondents assess the procedure as not transparent. This implies a similar appreciation of the transparency and fairness of the application procedure as in 2018.

Figure 5   *Perception of the selection procedure (2020 update)*

Did you find the whole selection procedure transparent and fair?
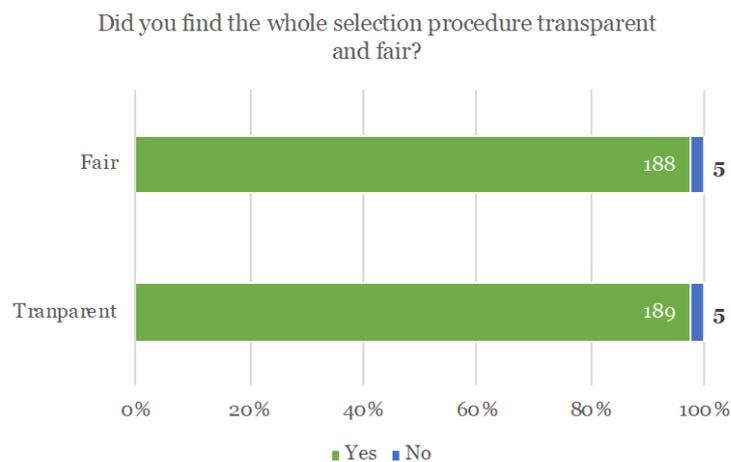
Source: Online survey of project lead partners (n=194)

Call	Transparent	Fair	Justification
1	Yes	Yes	yes, it's a good practice that could be translated at the national or regional level.
4	Yes	Yes	It was very important to know what you consider a correct geographic distribution of the partnership
1	Yes	Yes	The four possible areas to apply are very broad (low carbon economy...), so defining in each area what kinds of projects are expected from the applicants could be very useful to focus on these

			projects. For example if the previous call had a lot of projects on mobility, the next call should avoid to have again these kind of projects
3	Yes	No	the Excel list with structural funds for Portugal was not correct - it was not the mistake of the applicants and should have been corrected and then approved
2	Yes	Yes	Provided enough feedback during the process
2	Yes	Yes	I was not involved in the project at the time of the selection procedure so I cannot give a very detailed input in this regard, only feedback from my colleagues.
4	Yes	Yes	Although applicants do not really like two-stage applications, a better approach would be to evaluate shorter project ideas and modify them before writing the full application.
2	Yes	Yes	No further suggestions
2	No	Yes	I have no idea how the project was approved but I was very glad it was.
1	Yes	Yes	Since it was the first-call project, we could not recall how the selection process went in terms of transparency or fairness.
3	No	Yes	Here the reply not-transparent just reflects the opinion that assessment is not broken down to fully quantitative criteria due - certainly - to the nature of the programme. So it involves that the applicant may not be fully aware of the shortages of its application.
2	Yes	Yes	In later calls there was more guidance on the total budget and budget for LP
1	Yes	Yes	In our case, it has been fair. But we cannot generalise
4	Yes	Yes	Experts opinion should be available for all projects at the time of results
1	Yes	No	Sometimes it seems that people in the monitoring committee support applications from their own country and that not all members/member states have equal power.
1	No	No	As written above, for the first project I do not have any complaints. For the second I am sure some big mistakes were made. Explanations on why the project was rejected were not really in line of the call and the proposal.

(3) The implementation phase

This section details and analyses JS procedures to support the implementation of projects.

How efficient and effective is the programme support to beneficiaries during the project implementation?

73.8% of the respondents received all the support they needed during project implementation, 24.8% of the respondents are to a large degree satisfied and only 3 respondents received partially the support they needed, 2 project leader partners from call 1 project and 2 from a call 2 project. The level of satisfaction declines slightly overtime, meaning that the project lead partners from call 1 project had the lowest shares regarding "absolutely" and call 4 had the highest shares and that call 1 project had relatively higher shares of "to a large degree" and call 4 had the lowest shares of "to a large degree".

Figure 6   Overall satisfaction with programme support during project implementation

Did/ do you receive the support you need (from the Interreg Europe Programme) for your project implementation?

■ Absolutely   ■ To a large degree   ■ Only partially   ■ No

Source: Online survey of project lead partners (n=202)

2020 Update Evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme
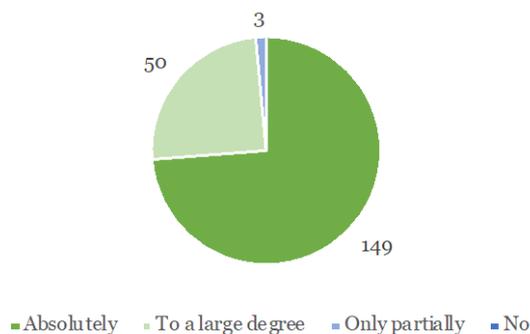
Despite high share of respondents indicating that all support needed was received by the programme, 97 respondents provided examples of other support that would have been helpful during project implementation. The answers provided suggest that some of the needs have already been fulfilled as they applied mostly to the call 1 projects and in early stages, i.e. related to setting up iOLF, templates and guidance material. Other examples for further support needs include among others:

- Lessons from other projects in the national context or with projects with a similar thematic focus;

- More webinars;

- Clearer instructions on action plans;

- Support on project management and the project partnership;

- Better criteria for phase 2 pilot actions.

What other support by the Programme would have been helpful during the project implementation?

Call	Answer	Other support
4	Absolutely	We are just beginning the project but I have found the workshops and webinars provided by IE quite useful. It's brilliant to have a common branding, where IE provides a lot of the (infra) structure for communication so that the project can focus on the actual exchange and learning activities. What might be useful, however, is to have access to lessons learned from previous projects on questions like: how to enhance learning in exchange activities? How to effectively engage regional stakeholders? How to improve knowledge transfer into the regions? Maybe some (online) roundtable discussions, as were organised in Budapest for instance, on specific topics would be useful. IE is nonetheless already very creative in providing useful support to lead partners.
3	Absolutely	Basically, solving doubts and the workshops were very illustrative
4	Absolutely	Participation of the Project Officers in the Project's Events.
1	Absolutely	We have bene VERY HAPPY with the support and option to discuss issues with our project officers.
1	Absolutely	Capitalisation of projects. There are many projects working on the same topic, so it could be very useful to know more about similar projects
4	Absolutely	Fastest guidance regarding COVID-19 situation
3	Absolutely	more examples on what 'policy improvement' exactly means
4	Absolutely	Maybe a training material with some tips on Change Management when force major events are faced by the project (like the pandemic situation we have now and the need to restructure/digitalize activities). There were webinars available on how to organize a successful online event and e-mail instructions prepared by the JS that helped very much, but yet, it is interesting to know how other projects are overcoming these problems.
1	Absolutely	Facilitating interaction with other project partnerships addressing similar issues. In CLUSTERS3 , we on our own got in touch with CLUSTERIX project partnership to exchange ideas, documents and good practices and also cross-visits to each other's project meetings.
2	Absolutely	idea of projects fair should be developed (once a year for example)
2	Absolutely	Mid-term review. Great communication and great experience.
3	Absolutely	We receive all the assistance needed for the project implementation very timely and always polite, understanding and flexible and helpful
3	Absolutely	I think the staff of the programme is very supportive
2	Absolutely	More flexibility and understanding of local contexts
3	Absolutely	I don't identify any big gap in this respect
3	Absolutely	National seminar/workshops/Round table with other successful projects in order to be connected and have suggestions from other project partners and LP.
4	Absolutely	modifications, cooperation with other projects or programs, support to modifications due to covid
2	Absolutely	Support in order to improve storytelling
3	Absolutely	I think support given to me by JS was very helpful and correct. But JS is also bound to the technical and financial rules of INTERREG program. In my opinion these rules should give more room for flexibility for project changes during the program.
3	Absolutely	webinar
2	Absolutely	Maybe more opportunities to discuss and exchange good practices with other projects, in addition to the Webinars offered, this is a really good opportunity to learn from other and implement good practices to manage the project afterwards.
1	Absolutely	It would have been helpful during the project implementation the involvement of the thematic experts at some point in the learning experience, for instance, participating during some interregional events.
4	Absolutely	For the lead partners' seminars, if there is a very experienced lead partner or communications lead, it would be nice to send a new to the Interreg Europe programme partner to these workshops, as they would learn a lot more. I met some partners in Budapest who were already leading projects and new partners in their projects could have gained more benefit from being in attendance.

Call	Answer	Other support
2	Absolutely	The existing support was more than enough for us, we did not need anything extra.
2	Absolutely	The Mid-Term review was very helpful indeed and really clarified some points and flexibility around policy influence. I think have an earlier review would have been helpful. Generally the Interreg Europe project assistance is exemplary and I genuinely think the helpful culture could be useful for other Interreg programmes to learn from
1	Absolutely	No more suggestions on that, the program's support was excellent in our case.
1	Absolutely	NA. The JS has been very professional and helpful in answering any of our inquiries.
4	Absolutely	In my opinion, the support given by the secretariat is adequate and sufficient.
2	Absolutely	Suggestions on possible connections with other projects with similar or complementary topics.
3	Absolutely	We received a lot of support and everything was quite clear!
3	Absolutely	We believe the support given (both by e-mail, programmes documentation and webinars) is very good.
1	Absolutely	Participation of the Joint Secretariat at kick-off meeting. Organisation of Mid-term meeting during the PPs meeting.
4	Absolutely	We have just started our project, so I will let you know after the 1st project reporting :)
2	Absolutely	When I had questions they answered mostly quickly
2	Absolutely	It was also somewhat learning by doing from the side of JS. We understand, but this brought some implications, e.g. not a good understanding of policy improvement and related actions in Action Plans
2	Absolutely	more room for experience with People who have already successfully implemented a project
4	Absolutely	The only thing I would have changed is the date for the reporting seminars for lead partner (the one that was held this year from the 21st to the 23rd of January in Budapest). It was organised a bit late for me as lead partner to provide all the information for the reporting. The seminar was really useful.
1	Absolutely	Our experience is very positive regarding this aspect. We had all the support needed by our JS officers (also with respect to other programs), so nothing to claim regarding this point.
3	Absolutely	more practical information (less official, more practical)
4	Absolutely	I have missed some email to know the status of the program
4	Absolutely	Cannot think of anything, support has been good
1	Absolutely	Content based & action plan design
2	Absolutely	In my opinion it is satisfactory
3	Absolutely	That the Programme could be more present physical at the beginning and end of phase one. Suggestion; that someone from JS participates at kick-off and end conference.
4	Absolutely	my Interreg - look for partners
2	Absolutely	Not sure if that's possible, but: could you on programme level make sure that the FLCs in the different countries don't differ that much in how they do their work? Also I find it quite unfair that e.g. the Austrian FLC is extremely expensive (and often very unfair and unreasonable in cutting costs), while in other countries it's free and way less complicated. This should be more balanced.
2	Absolutely	More tips from project insights (i.e. FAQs) on financial details and the policy instrument report.
2	Absolutely	We are happy with the support received. All questions have been answered very quickly and in a clear way. We have always had no doubts on asking and have received the support we needed. We do not have any complains.
1	Absolutely	greater flexibility in reporting times due to partner delays
4	Absolutely	The support we received from the JS and our Contact point is perfect, we do not have any gaps in receiving support and clarifications we asked for
2	Absolutely	Online webinars about different relevant issues (iOLF, reporting, good practices database...)
1	Absolutely	When updating the implementation manual a log file with a comprehensive overview of changes would be helpful.
4	Absolutely	Everything is efficient.
1	Absolutely	Earlier guidance on phase 2 within projects as some of the restrictions for phase 2 activities came as a shock to our partnership
3	Absolutely	All the support given by the Programme is really helpful by itself.
1	Absolutely	The steps to follow between phases 1 and 2 and the impact on the project budget were not clear to us in the beginning of the project. We also found that the criteria for phase 2 pilot actions could be better explained.
4	Absolutely	I find webinars very useful. Enhance them even more.
1	Absolutely	So far the policy and financial officers were really great, providing all the necessary information. They always provide reasonable solutions, their response is really swift. It is really a pleasure to work with such a competent team.
1	Absolutely	Clearer templates for RAPs from the outset.
1	Absolutely	Concrete examples on expected project activities - events - services
4	Absolutely	I think is interesting to know briefly the objectives of the rest of the projects approved in the same scope of the call.
2	Absolutely	None. Thanks to our officers Ilaria and Camille!!
1	Absolutely	In my opinion in a 3 years project in first phase the mid-term review meeting should be in the middle not close to the end of 1st phase. Maybe it would be useful to have more than one of this kind of meeting during implementation phase
1	Absolutely	direct feedback from the JS are very useful during the project implementation
3	Absolutely	A meeting with the two project officers, the lead partner and all partners at the very start of the project implementation
1	Absolutely	The support was absolutely sufficient and satisfactory.
4	To a large degree	Good Practise database for renewable energy sources in the agricultural sector could be interesting
1	To a large degree	More info on the Joint Secretariat expectations concerning the progress report and particularly the part dedicated to policy change.

Call	Answer	Other support
1	To a large degree	During the project I had some problems regarding the involvement of one partner to develop what it was committed during project preparation. I had requested help regarding the options that I had as a Lead Partner to press that partner, but despite the good accompaniment of my IE officers, I could not find tools to manage the situation. So, considering this experience I think that some support regarding tools to improve managements of partners' relations would be useful, including legal terms.
3	To a large degree	Joint design and implementation of Policy learning platform activities; active linking between similar IE projects.
2	To a large degree	More help for the action plan
1	To a large degree	faster response to progress reports
2	To a large degree	A clearer and more concrete support in the understanding of the action plan drafting (contents, structure, monitoring, etc.)
4	To a large degree	A more direct guidance, especially during the covid-19 crisis.
3	To a large degree	The organisation of more experience exchange actions, such as the Policy Learning Platform action.
4	To a large degree	Support with respect to "simple" and "effective" management, with examples and schemes. This would avoid the adventure of complex solutions both in the conception and in the implementation.
2	To a large degree	Some kind of technical review/feedback (at least after the 1st year of project´s implementation) about the project progress towards achieving its objectives and reaching its impact (including technical recommendations). This kind of comments are only provided to some extent, in the context of the periodic progress reports but only as a brief introduction previous to the comments and requests of change of concrete issues related to the activity report and economic claim.
1	To a large degree	More specific, clear guidelines that do not change in relation to what the Programme expects from the Project Partners before the start of phase 2
1	To a large degree	more intuitive Interreg download homepage better user interface inolf
2	To a large degree	When serious problems come up with a partner, online or phone guidance with the leader is not enough. I would have appreciated a greater and more personal involvement from the officers to get things back on the track.
2	To a large degree	The occasional participation of the JS to some Project events / meetings.
1	To a large degree	Clear requirements for the action plan development from the beginning. Actually there were some formal requirements that only rolled out step by step. We did not profit from any action plan webinar while other (later) projects did. Unfortunately this lead to the fact that after our regions submitted their action plans timely before the end of phase 1, we had extensive feedback loops with the JS in the ongoing phase 2, however, none of the partners nor the advisory lead partner had calculated budget for revising action plans in phase 2. Honestly, this was a bit frustrating for our partners.
2	To a large degree	Maybe more accompaniment or advise on how to plan a successful exchange of experiences during the first months
1	To a large degree	the projects I have coordinated have always received the right assistance when needed
1	To a large degree	We are a new team so we can't properly give helpful comments on this matter.
4	To a large degree	It would be helpful to have sessions during which to periodically discuss about the activities carried out, the problems and solutions to be adopted to make the exchange between partners more effective
2	To a large degree	There were a few examples of where templates and/or guidance for activities appeared too late, e.g. for the action plans it seemed the JS didn't really know what these were supposed to be like. The support we received from our assigned officers has always been very helpful but sometimes rather delayed (maybe they have too many projects to deal with?)
4	To a large degree	A better interaction between projects and platforms?
1	To a large degree	To be updated about European strategies
3	To a large degree	Since the project is executing at the end of the regional programmes period, there are significant issues with impacting the policy instruments of the current period. It would be important to have clearer guidelines on directions and potential impact to the next period.
2	To a large degree	More consistency on action plan communication from the beginning
1	To a large degree	the quick answer by email on specific problem or the availability for a fast call
1	To a large degree	Us in the first call were guinea pigs in many sense, e.g. iOLF was only being developed, the first reporting was both online and offline, the good practice database did not exist, there was no clear idea what was expected from the Regional Action Plans etc.
3	To a large degree	The contact with other Organizations experienced in UE Projects.
1	Only partially	More and clear information about the Regional Action Plan A stronger institutional support in favouring the linking of the RAP to the ERDF mainstream
2	Only partially	a closer communication to explain in detail the difficulties with partners, stakeholders and for the activities implementation
1	Only partially	National /regional assistance

Project partners generally very satisfied with JS support, with similar levels of appreciation as during the 2018 survey. Only more respondents made use of support on the mid-term review and reimbursement procedures, hence more accurate data has been collected.

Project lead partners were most satisfied with general JS support via phone or email. 87.6% of the respondents are very satisfied with this type of support and 11.6% was somewhat satisfied. Respondents explain that the support was helpful and was provided in short timeframes.

75% of the respondents were very satisfied with the reimbursement processes and 20.2% was somewhat satisfied. Only 7 respondents were rather not satisfied. Some project lead partners suggest to make sure that the programme can pay directly the partner rather than via the lead partner.

67.9% of the respondents were very satisfied with mid-term review and 27.1% was somewhat satisfied. Only 6 respondents were rather not satisfied. Some respondents suggest to put forward the mid-term review in the project development and not too much at the end, to make better use of the lessons learnt.

67.8% of the respondents were very satisfied with mid-term review and 31.7% was somewhat satisfied. Only 1 respondent were rather not satisfied.

59.9% of the respondents were very satisfied with online support and 38.1% was somewhat satisfied. Only 4 respondents were rather not satisfied. Some suggest more webinars.

The reporting processes are least valued, but still 57,6% of the respondents are very satisfied. Respondents are among others less satisfied due to different perceptions and suggestion on the reporting by different players (FLC etc.), or the general burden of completing the reports.

Figure 7   *Overall satisfaction with the programme support during project implementation* <mark>*(The "N/A" have been excluded from the new graph to make it better readable)*</mark>

Are you satisfied with the support from the programme to the implementation of your project? Please rate the following support tools and processes
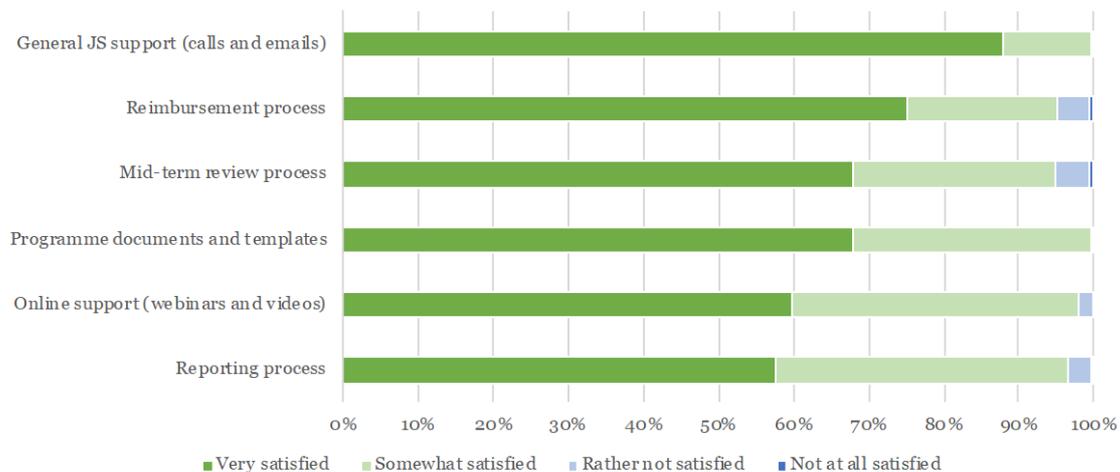
Source: survey of lead partners (n=202)
Only valid answers have been considered in the analysis, so the answers "not applicable have been excluded. 58 respondents did not yet receive or use support regarding the mid term review, 32 indicated not applicable for the reimbursement process, 4 respondents indicated not applicable for the reporting process, 3 respondents indicated not applicable regarding online support and 3 respondents indicated not applicable regarding general JS support.

Call	Documents and templates	Reporting process	Reimbursement process	Mid-term review process	General JS support	Online support	Please provide any comments or suggestions for improvement
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The strict break between Phase 1 and 2 has been a challenge too many of us; the restricted. structural fund availability to some regions have also been a very big pressure.
1	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	I was very happy with the JS' advice on administrative issues (partner withdrawal and partner change process; opportunity to have direct phone conversation to clarify individual challenges). On the other hand, the feedback and support on reporting questions (policy instrument improved, policy developments) was rather technocratic and the requirements very difficult to fulfil. It seems there is a certain miss-match between expectations on programme level and implementation on project level. This is rather a general concern; I don't know how this issue could be solved with additional support.
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Seminars/webinars are very useful for LP but also for partners. In this sense, the LP Seminars (communication, financing and reporting) could may consider the participation of other partners, overall, all those who have no experience in Interreg projects.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Activity reporting was challenging. A larger project with many partners requires more space to elaborate than a smaller project with few partners. It was my understanding that the reporting space available was the same no matter the size of the project.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	While cutting red tape of public administration and funding has been one of the priorities of the EC, we still find the reporting process heavy and burdensome. For each report, it consists at least four repetitive efforts in making one partners' report – including firstly the project staff prepare the report, the project organisation to review and audit, the FLC (and second national FLC in some countries) to audit and the LP to review and compile. The cost for the FLC is equally high due to this. It is recommended that the programme will simply the reporting process in the next programme period to ease costs both for administrative tasks an FLC.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	We propose that it is better if the Program pays all the Partners directly, avoiding doing it through the LP, thus avoiding the delay in payments due to the slow bureaucracy of the regional administration
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Despite the excellent support in everything else, when we had our mid-term review scheduled we had not time enough to think of applying for a pilot, because the time was indeed too tight already. We felt that due to the calendar of our mid-term review we lost this chance.
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The support of JS is very good; all emails were answered; all agreements reached on high professional level and in reasonable time-frame.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	In general we had a very good collaboration with our project managers from the JS and are thankful for all the advice they gave us. Just in terms of the action plan formal requirements the information we received was not always consistent (in-between also our project officers changed). It seemed as if the requirements were still under process during our first project phase, which made it probably a bit more difficult and time-consuming than for "younger" projects.
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	No specific comments, except tour thanks to the JS officers that worked with us during all the project implementation
1	Very satisfied	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The JS is very responsive by email, with very useful answers each time. Good work!
1	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The reporting process for some EU members is disgusting. Without any possibility to make the procedure more flexible and faster

| Call	Documents and templates	Reporting process	Reimbursement process	Mid-term review process	General JS support	Online support	Please provide any comments or suggestions for improvement
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Rather not satisfied	We had few webinars
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	If only possible, try to be more ready when the first projects are launched. It has been impossible for the JS to give us perfect support, because various things were still unclear in the beginning of the programme period.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Give a bit more flexibility for phase 2 activities - in particular around funding policy improvements and pilot actions.
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Webinars should be open to all the partners, not just the Lead partner.
1	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The reporting process is sometimes long and cumbersome with a number of clarifications asked for that could be avoided if the reporting template were clearer and maybe more comprehensive.
1	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	I can't stress enough how much I have appreciated the support provided by the JS during the project implementation process.
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	you may want to provide your processes and documentation to the NWE programme which is much more time consuming and complicated.
2	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	IE´S Reporting process, and related to Spanish partners (decentralized countries), should take into account the particularity of the additional step of the Spanish National Authority control (audit), in terms of the time that this adds to the process (apart from FLC´s time), more paperwork apart from work with iOLF,…. This should be coordinated with the objective of also simplifying this double control.
2	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The programme's unfolding, emerging position on Action Plans. It was not, for instance, clear that APs needed to be signed off by the JS before implementation could begin. There were often mixed messages between what was said verbally by the JS and what we received in follow-up written emails.
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied		FLC in Slovenia is working very slowly causing the delays
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	For non-profit organisation, the reimbursement process is always risky for the cash-flow because of the length of time between the start of the reporting process and the actual reimbursement process.
2	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Once the report fora given claim has been approved, the delay under which LP receives payment is satisfying.
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	No further suggestions
2	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Project templates documents are not that easy to find on the website
2	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	As for reporting, the templates were not available at the right time and we had to spend some time in providing details and justifications on specific activities.
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	When comparing with the previous programming period, all the tools and processes put in place to support LP have been of great help
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Policy officers were swift in their replies, correct, friendly and very helpful
2	Very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	I guess it is impossible, but the reporting process is highly demanding, especially for Spanish leaders. It may produce an imbalance between the efforts and the results.

Call	Documents and templates	Reporting process	Reimbursement process	Mid-term review process	General JS support	Online support	Please provide any comments or suggestions for improvement
2	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The iOLF reporting system could be a lot simpler, and there is repetition between the boxes to be completed on the implementation and activities tabs.
2	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Do not change iOLF, it is an excellent tool
2	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Some info about implementation, more specifically detailed explanation of action plan development, came a bit late in phase 1. It would be better if whole procedure was known from the start of project implementation as it would lead to more focused development of activities.
3	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The payments must be made directly to partners
3	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	It would be most helpful to simplify the system of reporting and increase the budget flexibility. Lump sum approach.
3	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	for minor financial corrections, it would be easier not to have the report certified by the FLC again
3	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	We would like more webinars on different relevant topics on project implementation. I.e. Webinar on Good Practice came a bit late, and our project are somewhat delayed on submitting GP.
3	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Although the COVID situation was clearly unforeseen, there should be a mechanism with which the JS could impose a decision on FLCs. There was a period during the handling of COVID where different FLCs were giving different answers to what would happen with costs of cancelled meetings.
3	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The website is not always well structured, e.g. the webinars are difficult to find
3	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	It is not fair that Spanish and Portuguese partners have the same time for reporting their financial report when they have 2 level controls instead of one. Please remove second level control, it does not matter if the first level control is centralized or not but one level should be removed.
4	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The reporting process is somehow difficult to explain in a simple way to the partners
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	It's a minor comment, but the questions for reporting are not always clear. The way some questions are formulated creates overlap with others. But surely, we'll get a hang of it.
4	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	In our opinion Interreg Europe is a good practice to be shared with other Interreg programmes in this aim (especially in the reporting system)
4	Very satisfied	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	The Project is at an early stage of implementation.
4	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied			Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The level of maturation of our experience does not allow us to answer all the questions.
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Reporting process: policy instrument reports per partner could be a part of the Progress Report (not different tabs). Lead partners need to be able to watch the partners' FLC reports before submission (we work with print screens). directly
4	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	The updated version of the Programme Manual does not provide enough explanation at places (e.g. modified salary calculation method).
4	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Because of the early stage of the project, some processes are not being evaluated. However, from previous experiences (INTRA, BEYOND EDP, etc.), the processes were very satisfactory.
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	I think a written guideline for iOLF reporting would worthwhile to prepare.
4	Very satisfied	N/A	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	We selected N/A because IRENES is preparing right now its 1st progress report thus we are not able to assess the programme's support in this process

Call	Documents and templates	Reporting process	Reimbursement process	Mid-term review process	General JS support	Online support	Please provide any comments or suggestions for improvement
4	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	I still have no feedback regarding reimbursement or mid-term reviews
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Especially the webinars and seminars have been helpful!
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	the reporting process is sometimes quite farraginous. Sometimes clarifications seem very bureaucratic.
4	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A	N/A	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	The project seminars in January 2020 in Budapest should have been at the start of semester 1 (or even before) and not at the end
4	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	Very satisfied	It would be better if all the partners had to complete a detailed activity report as the LP does on behalf of partnership, because sometimes partners do not feel to be responsible in helping the LP to do so.

56.8% of the project partners perceived the mid-term review as useful to focus phase 2 of their projects. This implies a small improvement compared to the 2018 questionnaire, although few respondents had experience with the mid-term review back then. Only few respondents as the mid-term review as rather not or not at all useful. Respondents suggest to have the mid-term review earlier or allow for greater flexibility between phase 1 and 2 of the project, including the allocation of funds from one phase to the other.

Figure 8   Usefulness of mid-term review for phase 2 of the projects

How useful did you find the mid-term review in helping you better focus phase 2 of your project?

■ Very useful   ■ Somewhat useful   ■ Rather not useful   ■ Not useful at all
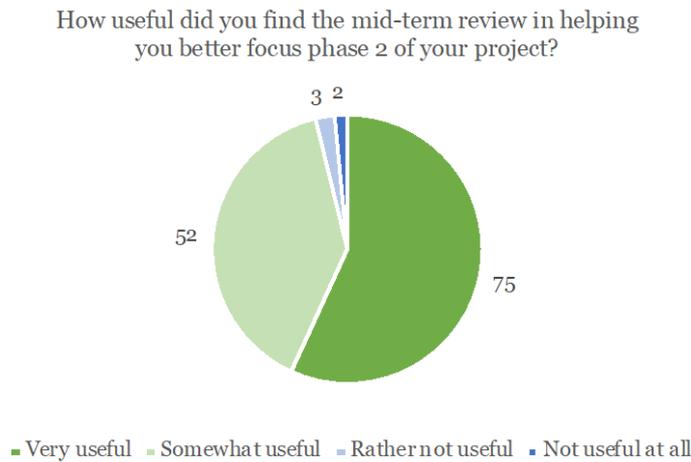
Source: survey of lead partners (n=132, 64 respondents indicated that this question was not applicable to them)

| call	answer	justification
2	Very useful	it really helped the project partners to focus on the final semester of phase 1
1	Very useful	Would be easier to have it sooner than 3 months before the end of phase 1. Practically it is the point where we learnt about the programme expectations as for action plan. Whereas we already have invested a lot of effort working on them. We have benefited from the review a lot. However we had different understanding of the core concept of the programme i.e. policy learning.
2	Very useful	No further suggestions
2	Very useful	it gave us straightforward feedback about the job being done and clear guidance about what was still expected to be done for the "closure" of phase 1 and the approach of phase 2
2	Very useful	It was just two weeks before a partner meeting, therefore it was very helpful!
1	Very useful	• The mid-term review was really useful. An opportunity for dialogue with the JS in the advanced phase of the project was really effective in order to evaluate the critical issues that emerged and to find the solutions together to tackle a successful implementation phase. For example, in our case, In our case, the mid-term review worked as resolute tool to solve the critical issues emerged about the indicators (It was difficult in the developing phase of the project to choose for all PPs self-defined performance indicators realistic and not overestimated) We can underline a very smart and collaborative approach in the review.
2	Very useful	For us it was very helpful to have time to talk with the JS about our progress in the project and to hear about what is expected from us for the final JPR of the 1st phase. It was great that they took quite some time for us and our questions.
3	Very useful	It was a time to discuss about the project and to speak about what runs well and what the problems are
2	Very useful	It would be even more beneficial if this review is done a bit earlier, maybe six months prior to current rule.
1	Somewhat useful	A communication from the IE Managing Authority to the involved ERDF Managing Authority would help to better implement phase 2
1	Somewhat useful	The Mid-term review was done on February, and phase 1 finalized on March, so, I would had preferred to perform the mid-term review at the beginning of last Semester of Phase 1, in order to have time enough for doing necessary adjustments.
3	Somewhat useful	During mid-term review, JS indicated additional possibilities for policy influencing in Phase 2
2	Somewhat useful	There was some confusion with the budget of phase 1 and the budget on phase 2 due to the fact that some of the staff costs related to the last month of work of the 1st phase can only be paid during the 2nd phase, but in fact belong to the 1st phase.
2	Somewhat useful	The mt review did not really "prepare the phase 2" and was very targeted (too much) on decommitment concerns

call	answer	justification
2	Somewhat useful	Inflexibility of the project budget, for example that you cannot move underspend from phase one to phase two even if you have a clear logic for doing so. It is worth remembering that in some cases project budgets were drawn up at application stage 3.5 years or more before phase 2 commenced. At application stage, it could be imagined that not the greatest of thought was given to what was needed for a phase 2 budget before phase 1 had even started. During phase 1 new thought processes and the infusion of new post-application ideas could help ensure that phase 2 would be better implemented. These were unforeseen when preparing the project's budget at application stage several years before.
2	Somewhat useful	The explanations and advice received to engage in phase 2 of the project were very useful and easily shared and accessible for our project partners. However, the review of the financial and administrative part of the project was not very clear to me at the beginning, in terms of what the expectation of the JS were. Then, the report and feedback received after the mid-term review meeting were also very clear and helpful for all project partners.
2	Somewhat useful	We found very strict conditions for action plan approval in some cases
1	Somewhat useful	Probably it should happen before..... at least 4-5 month before the end of the Phase 1 instead of 2-3
2	Somewhat useful	In Phase II the exchange should be more intensive
2	Somewhat useful	Yes it was useful to have a chance to reflect on the progress of the project, and to clear up questions from Phase 1.
2	Somewhat useful	Some of the issues raised later could have been discussed at mid-term review, but it's as much LP's responsibility as JS's.
1	Somewhat useful	A lot of the content at the meeting was surprising and as a Lead Partner it was difficult to explain to partners that their budgets might be reduced and that some of their planned activities might no longer be possible.
1	Somewhat useful	The Mid-Term Review took place when still a lot of work to finalize action plans was ahead of most partners.
1	Somewhat useful	Not just for focussing on phase 2, but looking back as well.
3	Somewhat useful	There is a fixed rule that does not allow shifting activities and their corresponding costs from Phase 1 to Phase 2. This mid-term review should help project leader to discuss with project officers the activities already done and which ones new have arisen. The project is something which is alive and during its implementation new challenges, new realities could have arisen as result of the project itself. This mid-term review could be used not only for reporting which activities foreseen in the AF are done and which ones no (the same at financial level), but to discuss possible new activities and to allow to development within Phase 2 if it necessary reducing timing for Phase 2 and increasing timing for Phase 1.
2	Rather not useful	the mid-term could have provided more effective insight to support the drafting of the action (see comments above)
1	Rather not useful	The midterm review is a useful process, my selection is based on the outcomes of the meeting
1	Not useful at all	In our case, the face to face mid-term review was unnecessary and unsuccessful. It could have been perfectly held online, saving the travel costs. There were no relation between what we discussed and agreed in Lille and what finally was stated by the JS in the mid-term review report, regarding the budget transfer not spent from phase 1 to phase 2 and the eligible costs in phase 2.

Is the procedure for deciding on supporting possible pilot actions clear and efficient?

Project partners find the procedures for receiving funding for pilot actions generally transparent (79.2%) and clear (75%). This implies a similar appreciation of transparency but slightly fewer project partners that perceive the process as clear. Respondents propose among others to better communicate the expected results of the pilot actions

Figure 9 *Clarity and transparency of the process to request funding for pilot actions (the "no-answers" have been differentiated by call in different shades of blue)*

If you have requested funding for pilot actions, was the process clear and transparent to you?

■ Yes ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4
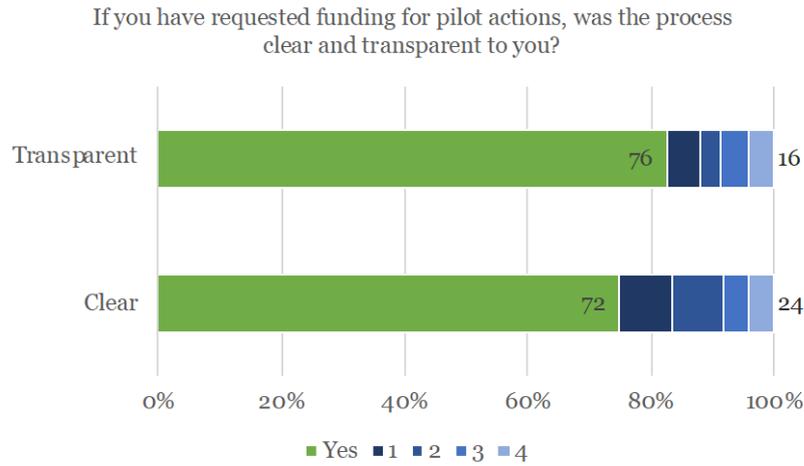
Source: survey of lead partners (n=96)

| call	Clear	Transparent	Suggestions for improvement
	No	Yes	more information on the interregional conditions of implementation
	Yes	No	I'm not sure if the process was too long, or it was just a question about when this should begin, but the truth is that my partners got the final Ok to develop the Pilot Action in 3 months after the beginning of Phase 2, what it means that the calendar scheduled is difficult to accomplish. This process could be improved defining a clear moment when the Pilot Actions have to be provided to the Joint Secretariat, just to have time enough for obtaining the ok before Phase2.
	Yes		Our pilot was not an easy case, we are extremely happy it was approved, and it has been a source of really deep learning and results on the ground.
			What has been beneficial to have the mid-term review is the possibly to validate the draft action plans. It is a pity that the reporting is not part of the ILOF reporting system and we'd recommend that this should be digital too.
	Yes	Yes	The process was clear and transparent but in our case it was not feasible as explained before
	Yes	Yes	However, it was a bit difficult to understand what kind of activities could fall under "pilot action" or could not.
	Yes	Yes	We found the process was very collaborative from the idea submission to the pilot application and approval
	No	No	Again, it was not quite clear what was expected from the pilots, so we ended up not suggesting any. Later on, it turned out we could have very well implemented some pilots, but for first call projects, the clear information/rules came too late again.
	No	Yes	It was not clear at the phase 1 application phase exactly what the process would be but it became clearer as we approached the end of phase 1
	No	Yes	criteria for pilot action eligibility were not clear
	No	Yes	In the application form it was written the proposal might be supplemented if not all teh information would be provided. We got rejected without any chance to really explain the idea.
	No	No	TRINNO was approved under the first call and at the end of the first phase wasn't very clear the possibility to request a pilot action
	No	No	Personally, as Lead Partner we did not request a pilot action; but 3 of our PPs did it. The application was not simple (quite challenging) and the keys to success (the key peculiarities of an action) remained not that clear
	Yes	Yes	However, the instructions about the expectations for the pilot actions have created a bit of confusion among partners, considering this was a new element in the ie projects. Maybe more additional details could have been provided from the beginning in order to shorten the process.
	Yes	Yes	Concerning pilot projects I would suggest to accept the implementation of good practices or ideas coming from the project implementation (even if they are not coming directly from another partner) as long as they have a clear added value and go in line with the programme priorities. Some good ideas can arise from participating in Interreg Europe projects that currently are not possible to implement as pilot projects because it is not a transference from one partner but a collective learning coming from the experience.
			For the pilot actions, we used the project's budget and requested no extra funding
	Yes	Yes	suggest these are submitted earlier before the end of phase 1 as the implementation period during phase 2 is very short
	No	Yes	It should be better described in the programme manual maybe with all specific steps
	No		I did not find it that clear and there was some misleading information at the start of the process about the types of project that would be eligible. Also we were working with an old template for a

			while, and it took a while to get feedback on the proposals so our partners had to work very quickly at the end to finalise their applications.
	Yes	Yes	There were some misunderstandings at first e.g. testing a voucher system was named as a typical pilot action while later we learned that it's not possible to pay vouchers to third parties. But now we understood. We have still hopes that one or more PAs from our project might get approved.
	No	No	request funding request not done, not possible to evaluate.
	Yes	Yes	Again: this became only clear to us when JS kindly explained (in a short/ simple text) what to do.....
	No	No	More guidance as to what might constitute a Pilot Action and how it is funded.
	No	No	We have not requested any funding for pilot actions yet, but have received information on this, from JS. In process with activities regarding pilot actions.
	Yes	Yes	As we had mention regarding the action plan, also pilot actions should be based on other good practices behind the ones of the partnership (the mix-up of these practices can represent the innovative element tilt actions ask for)
	No	No	We have not requested about the funding for the pilot action so far.

How efficient and effective are the electronic system tools (iDB and iOLF) developed by the programme?

iOLF is well appreciated by the project leaders. 92% consider the system as user-friendly, a similar share as during the last survey. Only 15 respondents assess iOLF not user friendly. These respondents find the system among other too detailed or acknowledge that it takes time to get used to the system, among other to find the relevant sections to report the respective information.

Figure 10   User-friendliness of iOLF (the "no-answers" have been differentiated by call in different shades of blue)

Do you consider iOLF as user friendly system for reporting on project implementation?

5 5 14

186

■ Yes ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4
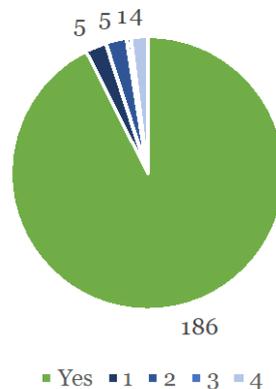
Source: survey of lead partners (n=201)

4	Response	Comments or suggestions for improvement
1	No	Yes and No. Certain pre-knowledge is needed to use the iOLF well. It is a little bit confusing if you don't know what you are looking for. Then it is tricky.
1	No	Too much detailed. In line with a so administrative consuming programme
1	No	Sometimes it's difficult for partners to remember where to report the different parts (policy instrument, financial, etc.) so we need to remind them every time.
2	No	"User friendly" maybe is not the best adjective. I recognize that for first reporting it was necessary to check video tutorials to clearly understand the system. In addition, we have detected some problems in its functioning, which have been duly informed to our officers. For example, external items numbers have changed during the modification of Application Form budget (required at the beginning of Phase 2), and makes very difficult to follow the item evolutions comparing new numbers with previous Progress reports.
2	No	It should allow for better handling information, more flexible to print different sections and data of the report
2	No	Many sections, layout could be easier
2	No	Not always. The way the information/figures of the expenses is included in each section of the iOLF could be improved. For instance, in the concrete case of the staff costs, it is a very manual and arduous work due to the fact that, also according to the Spanish National Authority´s instructions, for every worker several lines have to be open (per month, and then per salary and social security costs).Could some kind of "massive charge" tool be implemented

4	Response	Comments or suggestions for improvement
		in order to charge all data at one from, for instance, an excel file?. If this couldn´t be developed, could some kind of predefined form be used in order to avoid the introduction of some data that are repeated every time/line for the same worker?
2	No	User-friendly interface / Ability to export data of every frame / Visibility of tables (double scroll bar not friendly on laptops
2	No	I think if you are not used to, it has some difficulties
2	No	The structure of IOLF could be mainly improved.
3	No	not fully clear in all its parts, especially in the transferring of information from financial reports to the progress report
4	No	the same information has to be filled in different sheets, no referring is implemented
4	No	I would improve this system, as it is a very big disadvantage of iOLF that the LP cannot check the partner reports before the submission to the FLC. Furthermore, it would be easier if the certified report automatically become visible for the LP, so partners do not have to submit it separately to the LP.
4	No	It works fine but takes a long time to get used to and could be made a lot simpler. It is not very easy to be creative or share information in a non-traditional way.
1	Yes	The tables should be easier to transport to spreadsheets.
1	Yes	Comparing to the H2020, it is really user-friendly... The extraction of data put in place after the launch of the platform are useful.
1	Yes	Excellent monitoring system
1	Yes	Fully agree with user friendliness for financial and activity reporting. For the section Policy Instrument I suggest to also make visible "other interesting developments" reported in previous periods.
1	Yes	Interface isn't great but logical
1	Yes	The iOLF system enables electronic submission of Progress Reports and financial claims which is easy to use and efficient.
1	Yes	It could be more "user friendly" but, compared to other online platforms used for EU projects, iOLF is quite a good option.
1	Yes	Always room for simplifications. Time used for reporting should be less than actually working with project implementation each semester. First time reporting is time consuming. Once you get used to it will be easier of course. All in all nice tool, but many details to fill in for PL in JPR.
1	Yes	It's easy to use and find the documents.
1	Yes	Overall yes but it is not a platform at which you want to develop a report. You do that in a word template and then when you are done you copy paste text in the platform.
1	Yes	only the number of characters is sometimes very low for what is requested
1	Yes	However, it would be useful if the "policy instrument report" could be exported into an editable format in order to facilitate internal feedback loops.
1	Yes	It is not possible to work on to pages at the same time (e.g. 1.1 overview and 1.3 activities). You have to save the page and close and then go to the other one. Sometimes you have to switch between the pages.
1	Yes	It is somewhat difficult to include small changes in the finance section after the report is submitted to JS. First you need to exclude the report, then do changes, and then go back and include. This is complicated, and creates uncertainty amongst the partners, that is notified by email that their report is excluded.
1	Yes	Clear, simple and easy to work
1	Yes	When it was finally properly up and running, it seemed to work alright. Of course, it is a bit inflexible, but still far better than offline reporting ever was.
1	Yes	Budget breakdown per budget line for Phase 2 as well (applicable to the projects' of previous calls)
1	Yes	Though iOLF works well it would be desirable if Interreg programmes would use the same online system.
1	Yes	The system is extremely user friendly. I would recommend it to other territorial cooperation programmes as well.
1	Yes	Sometimes the limits amount of characters is challenging for all the information we are supposed to provide
1	Yes	Effective; no improvement needed
2	Yes	Maybe is not too intuitive when you enter in the system the first time, but the webinars providing guidance really help to understand how it works. One suggestion for improvement would be to make mandatory for partners to report on the policy instrument when submitting the report to their FLC. From the experience, partners normally forget to report on their policy instrument and the LP must remind this to them when submitting the common report.
2	Yes	It might be wise to give for instance PP's the possibility to upload documents themselves.
2	Yes	If the exchange rates change during the reporting period, you have to redo all your invoices, which can be quite exhaustive. The reporting periods should have a fixed EUR exchange rate which should not change after.
2	Yes	The Coordinator shall have the possibility to "see" the Partners reports online before their certification by FLCs
2	Yes	Well done; I have seen much worse systems
2	Yes	It is very user friendly system, however for LP is a little bit confusing at the beginning (e.g. excluding the reports for minor changes, rejecting (I made it by mistake)). The step with submission of the report to LP is often not clear for partners (we have to ask partners to do it)).
3	Yes	...once one gets used to it -- it's not immediately intuitive, but in the end I actually very much enjoyed writing the application in it.
3	Yes	The service design is somewhat clunky, with too many button presses required for saving and creating new versions of certain forms.
3	Yes	Compared to other software like Synergie, iOLF is way more user friendly! It is a great help, please keep iOLF for future programmes!
3	Yes	It is a really good and helpful system. It takes some time to learn the interface and functions, but then one really appreciates it. For very specific needs of changes in the report (complicated stuff) we always received clear instructions from JS. As it has been already developed so far, one would like to have more of it. It would be nice to

4	Response	Comments or suggestions for improvement
		have more functions for the LP to manage the key project aspects (budget spending overviews, progress overview, especially the indicators). More export functionalities to xls etc.
3	Yes	iOLF is a great tool. We propose that each Partner can send all the documentation directly to their FLC through iOLF
3	Yes	We have acquired sufficient familiarity with the iOLF system that we can say that the tool is really smart!
3	Yes	When it works with no bugs Yes
3	Yes	As individual I am used to eMS because I worked for another Interreg programme. Considering this experience of other Interreg tools, I reckon iOLF is very user friendly.
3	Yes	iOLF is very user-friendly
3	Yes	The character restrictions are imitating the quality of the progress description sometimes. A clear distinction of the required information in the respective textboxes in sometimes difficult. But in the course of the reporting process JS was always very helpful and give the appropriate advice.
3	Yes	iOlf is one of the better systems; however, the character limit is a problem in every report. The report should be divided into more sections or the number of characters for each section should be higher, for the report to be as detailed as possible.
4	Yes	see remark on the application form which could be simplified
4	Yes	DO NOT CHANGE our iOlf PLEAAASE. It has evolved into a great tool, and now also archiving for key documents. It is very excellent.
4	Yes	The limit of characters in some sections of the technical report makes difficult to include all information received by partners. Overall, the stakeholders section, which cannot be answered at consortium level, need to be specific of every partner.
4	Yes	IOLF was one of the most useful systems we have encountered, it was extremely helpful and easy to use
4	Yes	There is always room for improvement, but the system is ok
4	Yes	should be able to upload documents
4	Yes	For partners having various Interreg Europe projects, being able to access to the iOLF with the same user and see all projects in the same screen so then you can select the one to enter, it would be very useful.
4	Yes	I still have not understood the multi-version behaviour of iOLF. We had some issues with permissions to access when a new coordinator entered the project, which were only solved with the help of the JS.
4	Yes	Visually improvable. Some section could be more intuitive.
4	Yes	It's reasonably easy to use.
	Yes	add activity reporting on partner level, delete list of contracts (see details in next comment box)

Most respondents acknowledge iOLF as one of the best / user friendly tools in Europe, only few examples of elements from other systems have been provided, for example:

- H2020 options for online signatures and online amendments

- Central Europe system for attaching and uploading official documents

- Alpine Space system for user-friendly interface

- Hungarian ERDF / ESF system for user-friendly interface

- Mobility tool from Erasmus+

- 2Seas system

Do you have experience with other monitoring systems than iOLF from which Interreg Europe could learn? Please mention relevant features or functionalities and mention the tool. Examples of proposals.

Not that I have extensive experience with monitoring systems, but I find iOLF mostly logical and would not be able to provide relevant suggestions for improvement.
Despite my comments above, I recognize that the system works much better than some others (like SIGEFA of Interreg POCTEFA which is very difficult to understand and use)
iOLF is by far the best reporting and monitoring system we work with
I find iOLF the best monitoring system, I would rather suggest to extend it to other Interreg programmes
BSR Interreg, NPA Interreg, CBC, Horizon. I think iOLF if best and then BSR (BAMOS).
We have experience with other Interreg programs but we find iOLF to be the friendliest monitoring tool, so any suggestion.
Yes, but iOLF is the most user friendly
iOLF is the easiest one
I have experience of EMS, much more complicated and not very user friendly, maybe INTERREG Europe should advise them!!

Yes - eMS system in Central Europe Programme gives possibility to attach (upload) attachments like agenda of meeting, pictures, reports etc. Good solution is also possibility of LP to look at partner report just after uploading it in iOLF by partner. Now LP can look at partner report at the earliest after FLC acceptance.
maybe some procedures from HORIZON 2020, such as signing and issuing the official docs (subsidy contract, partnership agreement) on line from the legal representative
eMS for Central Europe projects has a better structure when it comes to project contents and deliverables
Only with the worst ones
The other tools I know are not as user friendly as iOLF, so I wouldn't recommend any.
Yes, come suggestions for improvement: - Possibility to export expenditures reported by all partners to excel from the common report (ems system from Interreg Europe allows to do this). Avoid the step of the partner to have to submit the report to the lead partner once is certified. In other programmes (i.e. NPA), once the report is approved by the FLC it goes directly to the LP without the need of having to remind the partner to enter in iOLF and send it to the LP.
We have experience in INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE and we can certify that the functions are comparable and in any case good.
Experience with NPA, another good system
I personally consider iOLF is probably the best one (or one of the best ones) of the existing monitoring systems, at least in comparison with other monitoring systems I know (e.g. Atlantic Area, Interreg Med, Sudoe, POCTEP...).
Interreg Alpine Space - eMS system.   user friendly interface
horizon
Coopera2020
Other monitoring system other than iOLF, that we are using with European projects, is the "Participant Portal" or Funding & Tenders Portal (Grant Management Services Portal of the European Commission), used for instance with H2020´s proposals/projects. - Amendments are done online. Changes are included on line, and the application generates a new and updated version of the proposal - Regarding costs: staff costs related to the last month of the reporting period and accrued in that month, can be claimed in full in that report, even if the effective payment of some of those costs (e.g. social security and/or personal income tax) is taking place in a different (later) month. -Information about other calls is also included in the platform. -this tool has a more friendly´s layout
Unfortunately not!
I work with cross-border and transnational programmes' tools and to my advice iOLF is the best system. An example of good functioning and user friendly tool.
This is the best one I have come across. The Horizon 2020 tools might provide some inspiration as for the portfolio of functionalities. However it is in many aspects far worse than IOLF - many different systems integrated in such a way that user gets lost. Very complex.
It's far better than the ones the other programmes use.
We work on POCTEP monitoring tool and, in the past, on the Atlantic Area tool and iOLF is much clear and useful, from our point of view.
I have experience on the eMS from Interreg France Channel England and Interreg North West Europe but this platform is not that user friendly compared to iOLF.
Nope, I think iOLF is by far the best tool we are using across different programmes
Generally other systems, such as eMS used in the Central Europe Programme are more difficult to use as you have more explanations to do.
Yes, with many other monitoring systems. I would claim that iOLF is the most user friendly and efficient tool I have ever used.
We have also used eMS system for reporting. One of its features that the iOLF could consider is to allow the partners to upload the FLC certificate and other attachments directly to the system.
So far, and in comparison with other Programmes, I believe iOLF is a very good and friendly monitoring system.
Even if it is a distant association but in Hungary the online tax system for personal income tax works much better than the iOLF or the Hungarian platform for ERDF/ESF funds. It is incomparably more user friendly.
yes, but there are no better tools
It could be nice to have an open section where we can give some extra information which does not fit in the format.
Although iOLF is a user-friendly platform (and much more usable than Synergie for INTERREG MED for instance), there could be an automatic tool to provide the breakdown of current expenditure per semester, budget line and partner alongside with a comparison to approved and current budget.   Even so, the graphic user interface could be improved (good example: Single Electronic Data Interchange Area from European Commission)
I think eMS is more user-friendly
The Interreg Europe is from the reporting point much better than the Interreg Danube or Interreg Central Europe. It requires more focus on the content (EE: RSG, Storytelling, PPs collaboration) as the mentioned other two programmes.
I know some other monitoring systems. I also like OMS (North Sea) but I prefer IOLF
Of the ones I am using iOLF is one of the easiest ones.
We have experimented also the eMS in an Interreg Adrion Application. It is also a good tool.
eMS is way worse but for one thing: it allows to enter all Staff Cost as a single entry for each period/work package, rather than multiple entries for each staff member
Other monitoring systems allow Lead Partner to see the costs uploaded by the rest of the partners before being validated. This is very useful for the LP
I have experience with ems from Interreg Central Europe. IOLF is fine. Would be good if Interreg Programmes could agree on using one tool.
We are working with different reporting tools, and find iOLF one of the best user friendly tools.
As mentioned above I am used to eMS. Nevertheless I never had an access as LP, only as JS member or PP of a project so this is not very applicable.
I believe that other monitoring systems could learn from iOLF
iOLF is better than other tools that are used in other Interreg programmes.
The iOLF is the most friendly system when compared with Synergie, esudoe and coopera2020
I think iOLF. eu is one of the best tools, better than PRESAGE , SYNERGIE.. or other tools used i.e. in POCTEFA ....
We also have experience in eMS. But in my team we all agree that iOLF is way better ;)
No, iOLF works much better than any other monitoring platform.
Add a chat with the JS.
Yes - Central Europe Mediterranean programme
Mobility Tool (Erasmus+)

I would say Interreg Europe has done well in terms of reporting procedures and systems. Getting rid of the timesheets, work packages and LP's FLC checking the whole report are some of the good developments that made reporting much smoother.
We are familiar with ems. But actually we like iOLF more. ems is too much subdivided and detailed sometimes.
iOLF is very good.
The 2 Seas EEP is also quite good. The NWE EMS and Channel EMS are less user-friendly.
We have some experience with the Interreg Med tool but I have to say than iOLF is more intuitive and clear.
SYNERGY MED, eMS, MIS However iOLF is the most user friendly
eMS used by several Interreg programmes has overcome its initial bugs and nowadays is more user-friendly than iOLF.
Funding & tender Portal: although it is very improvable, visibility in project management could be a starting point for the improvement of iOLF
I have used eMS, but it is far more complicated without providing any added value.
H2020 reporting tool is very user friendly and clear.
iOLF is great, and there are many other platforms that could learn from the development of iOLF.
Rather other tools should gain experience from iOLF system!
We have experience with many other monitoring systems and our opinion is that iOLF is the one on which all others should be based. The one thing that could be added is additional info in "Finance" section of progress report, more specifically "3.2.1 Budget breakdown per partner per budget line". It would be useful to have overview of spending per partner and budget line for all reporting periods and not only the current one similar like in tab 3.1.2 (previously reported/current report). Also, possibility of exporting these sections to excel would be useful.
So far is the best on-line tool I have used
I think your portal works well, except for the character limitation, and could assist other European programmes, ECAS portal for example
We use eMS in other programmes. I think iOLF has unique advantages (e.g. online certificates, online condition form, automatic email notification) compared to eMS, which are great. However here are some features that may be improved in iOLF: - activity reporting in iOLF on partner level. Currently only 2.000 characters in iOLF and separate information must be collected by the LP with offline forms. - possibility to see the status of partner reports by LP during the reporting process (see the status of the report, see the report itself even during creation in read only mode) - List of contracts in iOLF - is it needed? The contracting procedures are checked by FLC based on the contracts themselves. We do not see any use of this function.
EMULSA is novel in European Programmes and Interreg Europe is the first programme where Emulsa participates. No other - European monitoring systems are known.
We have some experiences with eMS, but in our opinion iOLF is more user friendly and easy to use

7.17 Annex XVII – "Second-level indicators" for internal monitoring purposes

Addressed aspect of the vertical intervention logic	Differentiated information on outputs	Differentiated information on results
Specification of the scope and outcome of the policy learning process	No. of interregional Policy Learning Events organised (phase 1 & phase 2)	• No. of staff members from project partner organisations with increased professional capacity • No. of project partner organisations with increased capacity • No. of stakeholder organisations with increased capacity
	No. of local/regional Policy Learning Events organised (phase 1 & phase 2)	• No. of staff members from project partner organisations with increased professional capacity • No. of project partner organisations with increased capacity • No. of stakeholder organisations with increased capacity
Specification of the ways how the content and outcome of policy learning is implemented	No. of good practices identified and registered by projects in the PLP database	• No. of identified good practices actually transferred to and implemented in other project partner areas
	No. of Action Plans developed by project partners (adopted)	• No. of Action Plans implementing only one type of policy improvement (type 1 or type 2 or type 3) • No. of Action Plans combining two or three types of policy improvement (types 1&2, types 1&3, types 2&3 or all three types)
Specification of the actually implemented policy improvements and of the associated policy change ("impact outcomes")	No. of policy improvements implemented by project partner organisations (from Action Plans or outside of Action Plans)	• No. of Structural Funds instruments influenced (total) • Influenced Structural Funds instruments with a link to RIS3 (either as absolute number or as % of total) • No. of other instruments influenced (total) • Influenced other instruments with a link to RDI (either as absolute number or as % of total)
	No. of policy improvements implemented by project partner organisations that influenced funding	• Amount of Structural Funds support influenced, in EUR • Influenced Structural Funds support related to RDI (either as absolute amount or as % of total) • Amount of other funding influenced, in EUR • Influenced other funding related to RDI (either as absolute amount or as % of total)