

Ex-ante Evaluation
of the
Operational Programme
INTERACT III 2014-2020

Ex-ante Evaluation Report
(on OP draft version 2.3 from April 2014)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report has been prepared by the Ex-ante Evaluation team. The findings, conclusions and interpretations expressed in this document are those of the authors alone and should in no way be taken to reflect the policies or opinion of the Bratislava Regional Self-Government.

1.1 Introduction

According to governing EU regulations an Ex-ante Evaluation and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are compulsory for such type of EU Programmes (like the INTERACT Programme 2014-2020)

Based on the available OP draft an interim Ex-ante evaluation is conducted according to the contract. Main aim of this ex-ante evaluation step is the improvement of the quality and consistency of the OP.

This report is based on the latest draft of the OP, version 2.3 from April 2014.

Before drafting the ex ante report, the evaluators absolved various meetings with the Managing Authority. Moreover, a meeting was held with INTERACT IP Vienna regarding output indicators, and a conference call was held with INTERACT IP Viborg regarding result indicators. Intensive communication took place to exchange ideas on the indicator system.

This evaluation is executed on the basis of a series of evaluation questions, formulated according to the Terms of Reference of the assignment and the methodological guideline from the European Commission.

1.2 Time-plan of the ex-ante evaluation

The indicative time-plan for the ex-ante evaluation can be simply presented as below.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Pre-contractual	Meeting M.A., MC (Vilnius), INTERACT IP Vienna, collect and analyze documents	17.3.2014 – 15.5.2014
Inception	Set methodology, communication with M.A. and IPs Vienna and Viborg, collect and analyze documents, draft Inception report / Report part 1.	15.5.2014 – 30.5.2014
Implementation	Draft Report part 2.	1.6.2014 – 16.6.2014
Final	Draft Final Report including SEA*	17.6.2014 – 30.6.2014
Closing	Complete Final report – including comments from the EC	15 days after receiving the comments

*The timing of SEA will depend on findings and delays in competent institutions such as the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak republic.

1.3 General opinion on the OP INTERACT III

OP INTERACT III has been developed over a sufficiently long period of time, from 2012 until May 2014. A Programming Task Force with representatives of the Member-States, M.A. and IPs was created. The draft OP has been consulted at the MC meetings and was commented in great detail by the MC members.

The OP is based on a needs' survey that identified challenges and needs among ETC programmes. A new management structure and division of tasks was developed through ample consultations. Possible problems with financing were identified in advance and addressed by requesting clear financial commitments for own contributions from the Member-States. The OP is logical and consistent and it contributes to Strategy 2020, macro-regional strategies and the use of innovative approaches.

The ex ante evaluation did not identify any substantial objections against OP INTERACT III, but suggests minor adjustments to the indicators.

As regards the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), based on the formal announcement (report) that was submitted, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak republic has informed the MA that no SEA procedure is required. The MA has circulated a written confirmation of this opinion to the partners of the programme.

1.4 Critical findings and recommendations

1.4.1 Horizontal priorities

Findings

According to article 8 (7) Regulation 1299/2013, the programmes URBACT, INTERACT and ESPON are exempt from the application of the horizontal principles of equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and sustainable development. However, these principles reflect primary legislation and fundamental policies of the EU, and to the opinion of the ex ante evaluators, should not be exonerated.

Due to this exemption, the horizontal priorities have not been taken into consideration when drafting the OP.

The ex ante evaluation underlines possibilities to apply horizontal priorities to the management of the programme itself, and to products and services that INTERACT III offers.

As regards the latter, INTERACT is actually paying some attention to **equality** issues in its products. For example, the INTERACT spring 2012 information sheet paid attention to the project *"Gender Resources Centres for Orientation and Professional Qualification of Socially Excluded Women in Albania and Montenegro"*, financed by the IPA Adriatic cross-border cooperation programme.

There are various examples of active approaches to gender equality in cross-border programmes and macro-regional programmes, such as the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013.

In certain EU countries relatively large minority communities are living in border regions. The presence of disadvantaged groups in border regions may give rise to cross border criminality and requires specific cross border approaches. Among others due to these factors, there are various ETC programmes that take an active approach to minorities and even fund specific projects for this theme. The evaluators have **not** found evidence that INTERACT is paying particular attention to **non-discrimination**, for example by exchanging best practices in this field.

Serious attention is being paid to the horizontal priority of **sustainable development**. For example, INTERACT and the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme (IEE) jointly organized a two-day seminar “Accelerating change at local level for effective delivery of sustainable energy solutions”, in May 2013 in Brussels, and IP Valencia is cooperating in a Mediterranean Lab Group for energy efficiency. However, INTERACT is not explicitly monitoring or reporting how many products and services it delivers in this area.

Recommendations

It is recommended to pay particular attention to the need for support in dealing with gender equality in the ETC programmes, to provide services and tools related to gender equality, and to monitor the activities of INTERACT in this respect.

It is recommended to pay particular attention to the need for INTERACT services and products related to issues of minorities, disabled groups or persons, and discrimination in the ETC programmes, to provide services and tools related to these topics if so requested, and to monitor the activities of INTERACT in this respect.

It is recommended to monitor and report on INTERACT products and services covering topics that fall under this horizontal priority of sustainable development and secure resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management. In this way, OP INTERACT shall be able to demonstrate its contribution to this horizontal priority.

The ex ante evaluation – full report also includes recommendations for application of horizontal priorities to INTERACT programme management itself.

Managing Authority response:

The recommendations will be considered one by one during the preparation of programme documents.

1.4.2 Indicators

Findings

The draft OP includes the following indicators:

Two output indicators:

1. Number of events
2. Number of tools

Six result indicators:

1. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the management and control capacity of ETC programmes
2. % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the management and control capacity of ETC programmes
3. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating programme results
4. % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating programme results
5. Satisfaction level of programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches
6. % of programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches

As regards clarity of the output indicators, the number of events and number of tools to be reported are in fact not the actual number, but a weighted number, calculated on the basis of the weight set for each type of output. For example, according to the method applied in INTERACT II, if INTERACT is the lead-organiser of an event, the event counts as 1, but if INTERACT is only a co-organiser, it counts as 0.5. Likewise for tools, a newsflash requiring limited resources counts as 0.3, while other regular tools count as 1. This method is clear and effective, but in case of dedicating relatively large inputs to an output (time or money), it could be justified to assign larger values to an event or a tool.

As regards the application of common (output) indicators provided in Annex I of Regulation 1299/2013, they do not directly apply to the investment priority and specific objective of OP INTERACT III. However a strong parallel can be observed with the priority *Labour market and professional preparation*, for which the common indicator is number of participants in activities. This is also a common indicator under ESF, which is particularly focused on human resource development.

As regards the interpretation of result indicators 2, 4 and 6 if the term *using* is understood as any use of an INTERACT product or service, the level of % is at 100 % for INTERACT II.

As regards the use of six result indicators, this seems rather complicated for measuring general progress achieved in one priority axis. When the indicators are broken up per specific objective, indicators for specific objectives where a low number of events are realized become rather sensitive to extreme values, for example in specific objective 1.3. DG REGIO recommends to limit the number of result indicators (e.g. to just one programme-specific result indicator for each investment priority and its specific objective). The six proposed result indicators do not seem to provide a more accurate view on the result/impact of the programme than for example two indicators that cover the same intended changes – without covering the specific objectives. More specific information can be collected within the quality management system.

Recommendations

It is recommended to rename the output indicators to „Weighted number of events“ and „Weighted number of tools“.

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

Managing Authority response:

The recommendation will be considered during the preparation of programme documents.

It is recommended to add the output indicator „Number of participants in events“. The indicator shall reflect the number of participants in events organised by INTERACT as a lead organiser (otherwise INTERACT is not registering the participants and is not able to generate the data). Considering the aim to provide high quality services, the target shall be to reach the same number of participants as in INTERACT II (no increase). The basis for setting the target of this output indicator should be sufficiently solid, e.g. directly extracted from a counting system in place for the last year(s) of implementation. To that extent, the ex ante evaluators developed a method for setting the baseline for the number of participants, in close cooperation with the Managing Authority. The MA then extracted the data from the data-base and prepared the calculation. The method and calculation are stated in Annex 1 to this summary.

Managing Authority response:

The recommendation is accepted.

It is recommended to use just 2 result indicators, the same as included now, but not broken down per specific objective:

1. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services - target is increase of value of 4.19
2. Level of % of programmes using INTERACT products and services (composite of application, usefulness and impact)

It is recommended that the second result indicator keeps the same name, but that the word *using* is interpreted towards the actual application and impact of INTERACT products and services (know-how gained ...) in the practice of ETC programme management, measured not directly at the end of events (as result indicator 1), but longer after – for example after half a year. In other words, the indicator shall reflect the **usefulness** of INTERACT products and services.

Managing Authority response:

The recommendation is not accepted. The intervention logic and subsequently the specific objectives and result indicators were extensively discussed with different programme bodies and outside the programme as well and are considered satisfactory by the programme drafters.

It is recommended to assess the usefulness of INTERACT products and services through a survey of ETC programmes. They will be requested to score the following questions on a likert scale from 1 to 5:

1. Were you able to use **know-how** that you acquired during INTERACT events in your work?
2. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
3. Were you able to use **tools** that you acquired from INTERACT in your work ?
4. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
5. If you were not able to apply certain know-how or tools yet, was that due to a lack of quality or practicality of the know-how/tool (score = 1) or due to other factors (score = 5)?

Note: if the Programme decides to keep 2 indicators per specific objective, so in total six, the above questions can be adjusted (split up) accordingly.

Managing Authority response:

The recommendation will be considered during the preparation of programme documents and updating the evaluation templates.

It is recommended that ETC programmes shall only be considered to be *using* INTERACT products or services, if the so-called usefulness level is higher than 4. This value is based on the value resulting from the satisfaction survey, which the programme already executes at the end of each event. The value 4 reflects the outcome of satisfaction survey questions 4 (*I will be able to use this knowledge in my work*) and 7 (*The materials provided are clear and useful*), resp. 4,24 and 4,09, with a downward correction. The correction is based on the assumption that after 6 months, not all know-how/tools shall have been used; and on the normative opinion, that on a scale of 1 to 5, the minimum score should be good (4). The minimum usefulness level shall therefore be 4.

It is recommended to set the baseline and target value for this indicator in a practical and effective way. As found in the ex ante evaluation, the baseline for using INTERACT services and products is 100 %. The target shall be 100 % as well, but it shall include the suggested usefulness factor, an additional quality criterion that reflects the ambition of the program to provide high quality services.

Managing Authority response:

The recommendation is accepted.

ANNEX 1 Baseline for number of participants in INTERACT events

In order to define a baseline for the OP 2014-2020, the following methodology has been used:

- Use of 2013 as sample year for actual calculation of participants. In order to define the events to be taken into account it has been agreed to use the events of 2013 present in the Event Registration Tool minus those that were indicated as "Support to external events" in the Annual Implementation Report;
- Calculation of 2013 events has been reduced by 6 events (3 with most participants and 3 with least participants) to eliminate extremes.

Based on the described methodology the final count has been of:

- a. 49 events;
- b. 2101 participants.

After the reduction:

- a. 43 events;
- b. 1724 participants.

In order to obtain an estimation of participants for the previous years in which INTERACT II activities took place (2008-2012), we have taken into account the amount of events of those years and per each year applied a coefficient calculated on a proportion between the events of each year and the events in 2013.

The following numbers were established:

- 2008: 23 events, 53,49% of the events in 2013;
- 2009: 41 events, 95,35% of the events in 2013;
- 2010: 50 events, 116,28% of the events in 2013;
- 2011: 47 events, 109,3% of the events in 2013;
- 2012: 36 events, 83,72% of the events in 2013.

By applying the coefficient the estimated numbers of participants for the previous years are (and considering for 2007 the average number of participants of the other years):

- 2007: 1891;
- 2008: 1124;
- 2009: 2003;
- 2010: 2443;
- 2011: 2296;
- 2012: 1759;
- 2013: 1724.

The total estimated amount for 2008-2013 of participants to INTERACT events, and baseline for the next programming period is **13240**.