



# Evaluation Plan

## 2021-2027 Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme

*Approved by the MC on 20 April 2023*

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## Part 1: Objectives, coverage, coordination

### 1.1. Introduction to the evaluation plan and its objectives

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027 evaluation plan is the **strategic document** which sets the evaluation framework and guides the evaluation work related to the 2021-2027 Programme.

The document is designed to help the Programme authorities in planning evaluations and to ensure that evaluations are implemented in high quality. This entails:

- Planning and carrying out evaluations in a timely fashion, on the basis of the Programme and projects` implementation phases and data availability;
- Allocating adequate financial resources;
- Assigning appropriate human resources with clear responsibilities;
- Identifying relevant focus and clear objectives for the evaluations.

The document sets the evaluation framework and main features of the methodology and indicatively determines the evaluations (type, scope and timeline). The evaluation plan is conceived as **a living document**. Adjustments and refinements might be needed throughout the Programme period.

The evaluation plan builds upon the 2021-2027 Programme document and its intervention logic. The 2014-2020 Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme and its evaluation plan were also considered in the preparation. The following documents set the **legal requirements**, in terms of what to provide with the given evaluation plan, when and how.

- Art. 18 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, so-called Common Provision Regulation, referred to as CPR afterwards in this document;
- Art. 35 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments, so-called Interreg Regulation;
- Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2021) 198 final, Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, referred to as SWD afterwards in this document.

### 1.2. Coverage and rationale

This evaluation plan covers the **transnational Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2021- 2027 Programme**. The Programme is funded by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Norwegian national funds.



Time-wise, the coverage of the evaluation plan spans the **entire Programme period**, up until June 2029 when the final impact evaluation is due.

The **Programme area** covers nine countries: eight EU Member States, namely Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany (only the NUTS regions indicated in the Programme document<sup>1</sup>), Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and one non-EU country, Norway (only the NUTS regions indicated in the Programme document).

The Programme area of Interreg Baltic Sea Region overlaps with other transnational and cross-border cooperation Interreg programmes. However, a joint evaluation plan or joint evaluations with other programmes are not considered feasible because the geographical and thematic overlaps with the other programmes are only partial and the intervention logic, which these programmes apply, differs.

**The main rationale** of the planned evaluations is to:

- Enable revising, adjusting and further planning the Programme delivery framework and the service of the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS), ensuring customer orientation, efficiency and effectiveness;
- Draw evidence-based lessons to be used for preparing for the programme period beyond 2027, including thematic focus, target groups and operational aspects;
- Analyse the project results and derive the aggregate programme impact with a view to relevance, coherence, sustainability, and Union added value.

### 1.3. Analysis of relevant evidence

In drawing the evaluation plan, due consideration was given to **analyses and evaluations conducted within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, in the previous period (2014-2020)**<sup>2</sup>. These evaluations provide pieces of evidence to take stock of and start from. In particular, the following documents were considered:

- 2014-2020 Programme - final impact evaluation
- 2020 Report on the state of institutional capacities in the Baltic Sea region
- 2014-2020 Programme - mid-term impact evaluation

The following **considerations** are made regarding the evaluations for the period 2021-2027:

- In the 2014-2020 period the **result indicators** did not refer to the direct Programme beneficiaries, but covered the whole population of the different target groups in the area. Therefore, changes in these indicators could only partly be linked to the Programme intervention, but were to a great extent dependent on other factors outside the Programme's influence. In the period 2021-2027, the result indicators measure the Programme

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the Programme document is published at [Approved-2021-27-IBSR-Programme-document.pdf \(interreg-baltic.eu\)](https://interreg-baltic.eu/Approved-2021-27-IBSR-Programme-document.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation reports of the 2014-2020 Programme are published at [Facts - Figures Programme 2014 - 2020 - Interreg Baltic Sea Region \(interreg-baltic.eu\)](https://interreg-baltic.eu/Facts-Figures-Programme-2014-2020-Interreg-Baltic-Sea-Region).



achievements directly on the level of target groups of the projects. This will make the evaluation of the Programme achievements more rational and reliable than in the previous period.

- The 2014-2020 Programme aimed at impacts in terms of **institutional capacity building**. This was a novelty of the previous Programme. In the 2021-2027 period, the focus on institutional capacity building remains. The evaluations from the 2014-2020 period provided useful information on how projects managed the capacity-building processes, which aspects of institutional capacity were improved in the target groups' organisations, what the success factors were, what the role of pilot actions was and what the role of different types of partners was.
- The experience from the previous programme periods shows that **the results of the first projects** emerge too late to use their evaluation as a basis for re-defining the focus of further calls in the Programme. The evaluation of the results of the first projects can be used as a basis for discussion about an eventual follow-up funding programme.
- The mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 Programme concluded that there had been a substantial influence of the Programme on the maintenance and ongoing development of **the governance structures of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)**. The main question in the 2021-2027 period is whether the adjusted type of support is efficient and effective.
- Several 2021-2027 **Programme objectives represent a continuum** with the previous Interreg Baltic Sea Region programmes. The findings of the previous evaluations are relevant when looking into the long-term effects of interventions in these objectives.
- The evaluations in the Programme period 2014-2020 confirmed that the **Programme management procedures** were effective and efficient. In the 2021-2027 period, the Programme bodies remain the same and will follow the procedures, which were developed and further refined during two decades of managing the Programme. A system of internal reviews of the Programme procedures and implementation will be maintained.

## Part 2. Evaluation framework

### 2.1. Responsibilities and the evaluation process

As defined in the Interreg Regulation (Art. 35), the **Managing Authority** is responsible for delivering an evaluation plan to the Programme's Monitoring Committee no later than a year after the adoption of the Programme. The Interreg Regulation (Art. 30) outlines the responsibilities of the **Monitoring Committee (MC)**, namely, for examining and approving the evaluation plan and its updates as well as for reviewing progress made in the implementation of the plan and ensuring appropriate follow-up to evaluation findings.



This evaluation plan has been developed by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region's Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS). It has been discussed with the MC<sup>3</sup>.

The MA/JS and the MC will together be responsible for all further activities related to the Programme evaluation, including but not limited to:

- updating the evaluation plan if needed;
- developing terms of reference for impact and performance evaluations;
- assessing proposals by external experts;
- managing external evaluations;
- ensuring a close dialogue with external evaluators;
- planning communication of evaluation outcomes to third parties;
- proposing and implementing follow-up activities based on evaluation findings.

The MA/JS has the coordination responsibility in the process, while the MC takes the main decisions in relation to evaluations. The MA/JS will inform and involve the whole MC in the evaluations throughout the Programme period. It welcomes inputs, advice and support from the MC delegations. The MC will approve any changes in the evaluation plan, decide on the focus of the external evaluations, confirm the selection of external evaluators and approve the final evaluation reports.

## 2.2. Involvement of other stakeholders

**The involvement of different stakeholders is broadly covered through the work of the MC.** The MC comprises representatives from both national (line ministries and other national authorities) and regional levels from the participating countries. In addition, the MC delegations are supported in their work by national sub-committees. National sub-committees of all the participating countries make sure that regional and local level, economic and social partners, as well as bodies representing the civil society participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

Throughout the evaluation work, further Programme stakeholders are involved. The extent of involvement depends on the specific purpose of a given evaluation. Surveys, questionnaires and interviews will be conducted in the framework of the evaluations addressing Programme stakeholders. These include representatives of the **EUSBSR, Programme beneficiaries and thematic experts**. The MA/JS will also share the evaluation results with relevant stakeholders through various communication channels.

## 2.3. Source of evaluation expertise

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<sup>3</sup> CLARIFICATION FOR THE MC: THE EVALUATION WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE MC MEETING IN MALMÖ. THIS FOOTNOTE WILL AFTERWARDS BE REMOVED.



As set in the Interreg Regulation (Art. 35(3) and in the CPR (Art. 44(3)) “evaluations shall be entrusted to **internal or external experts who are functionally independent**”. Functional independence refers to the independence from the authorities responsible for programme implementation.

Evaluation expertise to be used will be **mixed**, i.e., combining external and internal expertise. Impact and performance evaluations will be carried out by external evaluators based on terms of reference designed by the relevant Programme bodies. In addition, the Programme bodies will regularly assess and analyse internally the Programme procedures and operations. This is to check the Programme implementation and ensure the good and appropriate functioning of the Programme bodies. If major problems in the Programme implementation arise, an external evaluation of the operational procedures will be considered.

#### 2.4. Maintaining MA/JS expertise for managing evaluations

The MA/JS has considerable **institutionalised knowledge and expertise** in planning, coordinating and managing evaluations. The MA/JS has built its expertise through the experience of evaluations during the previous programmes. This will be used in relation to the evaluations in the 2021-2027 Programme period as well.

An **MA/JS evaluation group** is constituted, involving members of the Programme Unit, the Project Unit, the Communication Unit and the Director. The group consists of four to five staff members, who were in charge of the evaluations and who attended evaluation-related training and events already in previous periods. Therefore, they have insights and understanding of different methodological approaches to evaluation and of working with external evaluators. The MA/JS evaluation group is set to coordinate and be responsible for the evaluation activities. Members from the Financial Unit will be involved when appropriate, depending on the specific scope of the given evaluation.

The members of the MA/JS evaluation group are informed about evaluation requirements from the Regulations and the guidance documents from the European Commission. Moreover, they participate in **training events and workshops** organised by Interact, and they are part of the community “Thematic network on results and evaluation”, which is facilitated by Interact.

In addition, regular ad-hoc **exchange with colleagues from other Interreg Programmes** is taking place. It provides good occasions for peer-to-peer learning and exchanging information and advice.

#### 2.5. Use and communication of evaluations

Evaluation outcomes will be used primarily by the Programme bodies and the European Commission, as explained here below.

**The MA/JS and the MC** will make use of the evaluation outcomes to revise and refine the Programme delivery system. The flexible internal operational reviews make it possible to continuously revise the implementation procedures, if needed. Based on earlier experience, the major use of the planned



performance evaluations is the preparation for the eventual next programme period. Furthermore, via the MC members, evaluation outcomes will reach the relevant **national and regional administrations** (e.g. related to the implementation of other ESIF funded programmes).

The **European Commission** will be using evaluation outcomes in collecting evidence from all programmes for policy-making purposes. The European Commission will be provided with the impact evaluation due in June 2029. All earlier evaluations are made available to the European Commission as well.

The evaluations will also be published on the Programme website and made accessible to the **wider public** of the Programme. Additionally, communication on evaluations will be done via other communication channels, for instance through the newsletter and the Programme events. Communication on evaluation results will be prepared on a case-by-case basis, tailored to the actual evaluation outcomes and to the groups for which they are relevant.

## 2.6. Overall resources for implementation of the evaluation plan

When planning the **financial resources** for the evaluation work in 2021-2027, due consideration was given to the evaluation costs in the predecessor Programme. As already stated in chapter “2.3. Source of evaluation expertise”, the majority of evaluation work will be entrusted to external evaluators. The contract for the mid-term performance evaluation will be somewhat larger than the final impact evaluation. This is because of the numerous tasks which would be included in that evaluation. The evaluation might also be cut into several smaller contracts in order to find better expertise to carry out the different parts of the evaluation.

A **maximum total budget of EUR 200,000** is allocated to the external evaluations. The budget is reserved in the technical assistance budget of the Programme 2021-2027. This overall budget is indicatively split as follows:

- Mid-term performance evaluation (or the total of several smaller contracts): EUR 120,000
- Final impact evaluation: EUR 80,000

When it comes to the overall resources which are needed for the evaluations, not only budgetary resources are considered, but also **human resources**. A considerable amount of the MA/JS staff resources will be used for internal review of operational procedures, mid-term review, supporting external evaluators and for the follow-up of the evaluations. For this, no specific budget is indicated in the evaluation plan. However, it is considered in the MA/JS staff plan covered by the technical assistance budget.

## Part 3. Planned evaluations

### 3.1. Overview of planned evaluations



This chapter provides an overview of evaluations which are planned to be undertaken during the programme period. In view of this planning, the MA/JS considered the requirements which were set in the Regulations. In addition, the main characteristics of the 2021-2027 Programme were taken into account and methodological considerations were made. All these considerations are explained below:

**The Regulations were considered, in view of ensuring that the requested evaluations are planned and that these comply with the set requirements** (for instance in terms of the type of evaluation, criteria to be covered and of the deadline for submission to the European Commission). In particular:

- Interreg Regulation, Art. 35 “Evaluation during the programming period” sets inter alia the following:
  - “1. The Member State or the managing authority shall carry out evaluations of the programmes related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme.”
  - “2. In addition to the evaluations referred to in paragraph 1, an evaluation for each programme to assess its impact shall be carried out by 30 June 2029.”
- CPR Art. 18 “Mid-term review and flexibility amount” sets inter alia the following:
  - “1. For programmes supported by the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the JTF, the Member State shall review each programme, taking into account the following elements: [...] (f) the progress in achieving the milestones, taking into account major difficulties encountered in the implementation of the programme; [...]
  - 2. The Member State shall submit an assessment for each programme on the outcome of the mid-term review, [...] to the Commission by 31 March 2025.”

**The MA/JS considered the main characteristics of the Programme in defining the specific scope of the evaluations, meaning the aspects to be assessed.** The following aspects were deemed as the most relevant:

- Transnationality is the key characteristic of the Programme.
  - The 2021-2027 Programme focuses on local and regional public authorities and the aim to attract more newcomers provide also room for assessment and evaluation.
  - The 2021-2027 Programme features some Programme objectives which are thematically close to the Programme objectives of the 2014-2020 Programme (including, 2.1 Sustainable Waters, 2.2 Blue Economy, 3.2 Energy Transition, 3.3. Smart Green Mobility). Evaluating these thematically close objectives in 2021-2027 should entail consideration of the evaluation findings from 2014-2020.
- Other 2021-2027 Programme objectives represent an untapped ground for the Programme (1.1 Resilient Economies and Communities, 1.2 Responsive Public Services, 3.1 Circular Economy).
- The Programme objectives under thematic Priority 4 “Cooperation governance” are very different from the objectives under the other three priorities. In particular, Programme





objective 4.1 (Project platforms) focuses on the synthesis and capitalisation of achievements from projects within priorities 1-3. Programme objective 4.2 (Macro-regional governance supports the EUSBSR governance structure and its communication.

- The 2021-2027 Programme presents novelties compared to the preceding Programme concerning the project types and structure (e.g. small projects, work plan structure, simplified cost options).
- The theory of change and the meaning of “impact” underpinning the 2021-2027 Programme set the frame of what performance the Programme aims at. The overall scope of building institutional capacities and the focus on tangible and durable outputs (ref. to solutions and pilot activities), as well as on the transfer and uptake of results are the cornerstones of this framework. The methodology paper (i.e. “Methodology for the establishment of the Performance Framework”) explains it in detail.

#### **Methodological considerations and data availability:**

- For what concerns the methodology of impact evaluations: in general, the qualitative approach seems more feasible than the quantitative approach. Theory-based impact evaluation seems more feasible than counterfactual impact evaluation. Nevertheless, statistical data on indicators will provide quantitative data as proof to support the qualitative analysis of the impacts of operations.
- For what concerns data availability: Key data will be available in the electronic data exchange system BAMOS+. BAMOS + allows for collecting quantitative and qualitative information on projects’ outputs, results (indicators) and related achievements, as well as on target groups. It will be a large set of data which are particularly relevant for the performance and impact evaluations. In addition, relevant data is available from previous evaluations. Furthermore, complementary data will be collected by external evaluators through tailor-made surveys/questionnaires, interviews and case studies. Given the Programme area and the aspect of transnational cooperation, little data is available outside the Programme scope itself.

Based on all these considerations, the table below shows the planned evaluations.

The overview of evaluations is indicative. Different evaluation needs may arise in the course of the Programme and the evaluation plan might be, consequently, subject to revision. Furthermore, the actual approach and questions of each evaluation will be defined more in detail at a later stage, once their planning will start. Tailoring the focus and questions of evaluations might also be adjusted, because of the methodological proposals of the external evaluators. In addition, it is to be later considered whether the mid-term evaluation should be divided into parts in order to procure more specified expertise.



	<b>Title</b>	<b>Subject and rationale (type of evaluation, scope, criteria, evaluation questions)</b>	<b>Methods (expertise and data)</b>	<b>Timing (schedule and duration)</b>	<b>Budget</b>
1.	<b>Internal operational review</b>	<p><b>Regular internal assessment of procedures and communication activities immediately after their completion.</b></p> <p>Criteria: effectiveness, efficiency</p> <p><b>Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of programme implementation procedures</b></p> <p>Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Were the consultation/assessment/contracting/monitoring procedures effective and efficient? What can be improved?</li> <li>- Were the communication tools and support by the MA/JS useful for the applicants and project partners? Which communication channels were the most efficient ones?</li> </ul>	<p>Internal expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Surveys with applicants, project partners, MC members, EUSBSR coordinators</li> <li>- Internal performance data (number of consultations, number of applications, number of reports etc., duration of procedures)</li> </ul> <p>External evaluation if major problems arise</p>	continuous	Included in the staff costs of the MA/JS
2.	<b>Mid-term review of milestones</b>	<p><b>Examination of achievements of milestones for all output indicators against the targets set by the mid-term.</b> (According to the CPR Art. 18)</p> <p>Criteria: Relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency</p> <p>Note: The milestones for result indicators by 2024 are 0.</p>	<p>Internal expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In-house data on output indicators, derived from the electronic data exchange system BAMOS+</li> </ul>	<p>second half of 2024 (to be handed in to the European Commission by March 2025)</p> <p>6 months</p>	Included in the staff costs of the MA/JS



3.	<b>Mid-term performance evaluation (may be divided into 2-4 thematic evaluations)</b>	<p><b>Performance evaluation to draw evidence-based lessons for the next programme period</b></p> <p>Criteria: Relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value</p> <p><b>Task 1.</b> <b>Assess the relevance of the Programme Objectives’ thematic focus</b> Indicative questions: Specific for the Programme objectives which represent a continuity to the 2014-2020 Programme (2.1, 2.2, 3.2, 3.3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did the thematic focus within these Programme objectives change compared to the Programme 2014-2020?</li> <li>- What is the added value of the Programme 2021-2027 compared to the Programme 2014-2020 in these topics?</li> </ul> <p>Specific for the new Programme objectives not present in the 2014-2020 Programme (1.1, 1.2, 3.1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the thematic focus of projects within these Programme objectives?</li> <li>- How is the specific focus of the Programme on communities and on social topics implemented through projects? What do projects achieve in these topics? What is different in addressing social topics in the Programme in comparison to projects within the European Social Fund?</li> <li>- e.g. for 1.1: In which contexts and from which angle did projects address the challenge of resilience?</li> <li>- e.g. for 1.2: Which public services did projects focus on? How were they improved/developed as more responsive?</li> </ul>	<p>External expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in-house project data, from the electronic data exchange system (BAMOS+)</li> <li>- surveys and interviews with beneficiaries and experts (external thematic experts, as well as Monitoring Committee members) to complement in-house data</li> <li>- case studies (to complement in-house data)</li> </ul>	<p>First half of 2026</p> <p>6 months</p>	<p>EUR 120,000</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- e.g. for 3.1: From which angle did projects address the challenge of circular economy?</li> </ul> <p>For all Programme objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the interest of different types of organisations in the Programme objectives (including differences between countries)? Who are the main beneficiaries/target groups within the Programme objectives?</li> <li>- What kind of patterns are there in implementation and performance (e.g. recurrent challenges, strengths in implementations, forecast of results or impacts)?</li> <li>- What can be concluded on the “Interreg niche” (e.g. public actor focus) and the Baltic Sea Region specificity of the cooperation topics?</li> </ul> <p><b>Task 2.</b>  <b>Assess the long-term effects of the interventions from the previous programme period</b></p> <p>Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What has been the durability after the 2014-2020 projects’ end, in terms of projects outputs and results including institutional capacities? (to be done for selected objectives)</li> <li>- Did the projects in 2021-2027 consider and make use of the outputs and results of projects from 2014-2020?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in-house project data, from AF and reports monitoring (BAMOS and BAMOS+ data)</li> <li>- surveys and interviews with beneficiaries and experts (external thematic experts, as well as Monitoring Committee members) to complement in-house data</li> <li>- case studies (to complement in-house data)</li> <li>- surveys with projects from the previous and current period, including case studies and interviews with them</li> </ul>		
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		<p><b>Task 3.</b>  <b>Assess the new Programme features for projects (especially: small projects, focus on pilots and solutions for core projects, focus on transfer and uptake of solutions for core projects, simplified-cost-options -SCOs)</b></p> <p>Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the performance of <b>small projects</b> compared to core projects (e.g. reference to smaller budget vs actual achievements; in which topics do small projects work well and in which do not?) How did small projects attract different types of organisations and newcomers compared to core projects?</li> <li>- Does the focus on <b>pilots and on testing of solutions</b> lead to more tangible results? Are the solutions which are tested and adjusted through pilots more useful and durable for the target groups? Are the benefits for the target groups more visible? Are pilots key for increasing the capacities of the target groups?</li> <li>- Which were the most effective mechanisms and practices of <b>transfer and uptake of solutions</b>? Did they differ depending on the target groups or thematic objective? What was the role of EUSBSR policy area coordinators in supporting the transfer of project results to target groups?</li> <li>- Did <b>SCOs</b> reduce the workload on the project and MA/JS? Did SCOs have an impact on the activities and on the tangibility of outcomes in small projects? What was the impact of SCOs on budget adequacy in core projects? How did SCOs influence participation in the projects (ref. to different types of project partners and to project partners from the different</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in-house project data, from AF and reports monitoring (BAMOS+ data)</li> <li>- surveys and interviews with beneficiaries and experts (external thematic experts, as well as Monitoring Committee members) to complement in-house data</li> <li>- case studies (to complement in-house data)</li> </ul>		
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		<p>participating countries)? Did SCOs have an effect on transnational exchange (ref. to e.g. Cost Category 3 – travel and accommodation costs)?</p> <p><b>Task 4.</b>  <b>Assess the support to the EUSBSR governance and communication</b>  Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the efficiency and effectiveness of the project types for the EUSBSR support (PACs assistance, support to Strategy Point, organisation of the Strategy Forums)?</li> <li>- What is the effectiveness of the additional support to PACs for project idea generation and development?</li> <li>- What are the differences in efficiency compared to how the funding to EU macro-regional strategy governance is organised within other Interreg programmes?</li> </ul> <p><b>Task 5.</b>  <b>Assess selected Programme implementation procedures and tools</b>  Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any elements of the application process which could be improved? How to make the monitoring process more efficient?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviews and survey with supported PACs, BSP, Forum organisers, NC group and PA steering groups</li> <li>- Survey with organisations whom PACs engaged to generate and develop project ideas, follow up on ideas (applications, funds granted)</li> <li>- Desk research and data collection for other Interreg programmes supporting the related EU macro-regional strategies' governance (i.e. Alpine Space, Danube Region, ADRION)</li> <li>- In-house data on procedures and internal operational review (e.g. duration, results and related to applicants' and beneficiaries' satisfaction)</li> </ul>		
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		<p><b>Task 6.</b>  <b>Assess the Programme communication strategy and its implementation</b>  Indicative questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the influence of hosting project pages on the Programme portal on communicating the projects' efficiently (in comparison to solutions from the previous Programme)?</li> <li>- Do the beneficiaries feel part of "Interreg family"? If yes, how does it show?</li> <li>- Are there lessons learned from projects and Programme communication or needs for immediate improvements to address new/arising expectations?</li> <li>- Is the Programme communication effective in raising the awareness of decision-makers (national and/or EU levels) about the Programme (e.g. via project examples from the region)? Do the decision-makers consider the Programme useful?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In-house data of applicants and beneficiaries, related to the use of communication tools</li> <li>- In-house data on beneficiaries' satisfaction with MA/JS events (e.g. webinars)</li> <li>- additional survey among beneficiaries</li> </ul>		
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Final impact evaluation</b></p>	<p><b>Impact evaluation of the Programme</b>  (According to the Interreg Regulation Art. 33)</p> <p>Criteria:  Relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value</p> <p><b>Focus on result indicators and performance of projects in all Programme objectives, in all project types, throughout the whole Programme period:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RCR 104 "solutions taken up and upscaled by organisations" (for projects within Priorities 1-3)</li> </ul>	<p>External expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in-house project data, from reports monitoring (BAMOS+ data)</li> <li>- surveys and interviews with beneficiaries and experts (external thematic experts, as well as Monitoring Committee members) to complement in-house data</li> </ul>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2028 (to be handed to EC by June 2029)</p> <p>6 months</p>	<p>EUR 80,000</p>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RCR 84 “organisations cooperating across borders after project completion” (for projects within SO 4.2)</li> <li>- PSR 1 “organisations with increased institutional capacities due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders” (for projects within Priorities 1-3 and SO 4.1)</li> </ul> <p>Indicative questions. The list of questions will be complemented based on the mid-term evaluation and needs aroused during the Programme implementation):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In which topics were the result indicators achieved i.e. results produced? In which topics were results not achieved; which were the reasons for non-achievements?</li> <li>- What sorts of solutions have the highest chance to get upscaled? What influences this process?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- case studies (to complement in-house data)</li> </ul>		
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*Tab 1: Overview of planned evaluations*





### 3.2. Quality management strategy

Quality is a priority and shared commitment of the MA/JS evaluation group, MA/JS staff involved in the collection of data and other information, and the MC. Likewise, the contracted external evaluators must share the MA/JS and MC understanding and standards of quality.

The four (or even more)-eyes-principle is applied in each stage of the evaluation cycle. The table below lists further elements and considerations, in order to assure the good quality of evaluation work and of evaluations themselves. The Programme’s previous experiences with evaluations and the related findings, lessons learnt and recommendations contributed to the definition of these considerations<sup>4</sup>. These will guide the MA/JS work throughout the various stages of the evaluation cycle.

<b>Evaluation cycle stage</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Considerations for quality assurance</b>
<b>Planning</b>	<b>Expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer-to-peer learning within the MA/JS: Experienced MA/JS staff already previously involved in evaluations pass on knowledge to other MA/JS staff involved in the evaluation group. MA/JS staff will be informed about evaluation requirements e.g. with reference to the Regulations, information received from the European Commission and experiences of other Interreg programmes</li> <li>- MA/JS staff participation in (external) training events</li> <li>- Sound selection of external evaluators, as part of the tender procedure carried out by the MA/JS under the MC supervision</li> </ul>
	<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear allocation of evaluation tasks and responsibilities within the MA/JS staff (including data collection)</li> <li>- Adequate schedule of evaluations during the Programme period and adequate time allocation for their duration</li> </ul>
	<b>Scope and relevance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MA/JS and MC discussion and clear definition of the evaluation scope during the preparation of the Terms of Reference for the external evaluations and during the planning for the internal evaluations/assessments</li> <li>- Clarity and specificity of the Terms of Reference</li> <li>- MC check and approval of the Terms of Reference</li> </ul>
	<b>Transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thorough and accurate assessment of the tenders submitted by the external evaluators;</li> <li>- Accurate documentation of the process of assessing and selecting external evaluators;</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> The following document was considered as well: Evalsed, The Source for Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, 2013, pp.45-56



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Timely and accurate transmission of information on assessment results to the MC and to the tenderers (external evaluators)</li> </ul>
	<b>Appropriate design and methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sound selection of the tenders of the external evaluators,</li> <li>- Thorough awareness of external evaluators and of MA/JS of previous evaluations within the Programme and lessons learned.</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular discussions and checks on ongoing evaluation work (both within the MA/JS, as well as in relation to the external evaluators' work)</li> </ul>
	<b>Transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular information transmission from the MA/JS to the MC about the assessment of the tenders, the external evaluators' work and the MA/JS evaluation work</li> <li>- Open communication of MA/JS, MC and external evaluators with other stakeholders involved in the evaluations (e.g. beneficiaries taking part in surveys or case studies)</li> </ul>
	<b>Reliability of data and info</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Well-functioning online monitoring system and accurate MA/JS work in the system securing the quality of project data</li> <li>- Sound data and information collection by the external evaluators</li> <li>- Reliability of sources of further data and information (surveys, interviews, desk research)</li> </ul>
	<b>Sound analysis and credibility of conclusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thorough formulation of hypotheses to be tested confirmed or confuted through the analysis</li> <li>- Reliability and adequacy of sources of data and information</li> <li>- Transparent methods of analysis</li> <li>- Complementary use of different methods and triangulation of findings, where possible</li> <li>- Appropriate timing (timely data and information collection and their analysis)</li> <li>- Impartiality in drawing conclusions from findings (no bias, sound judgement)</li> <li>- Clear and sound arguments justifying the conclusions and recommendations.</li> </ul>
	<b>Efficiency of collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MA/JS evaluation group's good management and coordination, regular discussions</li> <li>- Targeted regular involvement of the MC</li> <li>- Open, and clear communication with the external evaluators (e.g. on evaluation tasks, expectations, MA/JS support, availability of data)</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experienced leadership in the whole process (not only at the stage of validation of conclusions), both on the side of MA/JS evaluation group as well as on the side of the external evaluators</li> </ul>
<b>Use and communication</b>	<b>Clearness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear report with specific conclusions and recommendations on follow-up measures</li> </ul>
	<b>Dissemination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement of MA/JS communication team</li> <li>- Plan the communication at the stage of evaluation planning. Adapt it during the implementation upon need.</li> <li>- Use of different communication channels and formats for communication to different stakeholders</li> <li>- Timely communication about evaluations findings</li> </ul>
	<b>Commitment to follow-up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Timely discussion and clear plan for follow-up actions among the MA/JS and the MC</li> <li>- Monitoring of follow-up actions</li> </ul>

*Tab 2: Quality assurance considerations*



## List of References

### European Commission Regulations:

Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy

Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments

European Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2021) 198 final, Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027

Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the ESIF

### Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme documents:

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027 Programme document

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2021-2027 Methodology for the establishment of the Performance Framework

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014-2020 Programme final impact evaluation

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2020 Report on the state of institutional capacities in the Baltic Sea Region

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014-2020 Programme mid-term impact evaluation

### Other references:

Q&A: Evaluation Plan, summarising the discussions of Interact Evaluation Plan event of 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Evaluation Plan, Interact Briefing note. Version 1. January 2022

Evalsed, The Source for Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, 2013