

Interreg - IPA CBC

Croatia - Serbia



Evaluation plan

Version 1.0., August 2016

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1. Introduction and legal requirements

In the programming period 2014-2020, there is a focus on programme evaluation, especially on impact evaluation and on demonstrating the programme contribution to achieving programme objectives. Results of evaluations will serve as:

- a tool to improve the quality, design and implementation of the programme, in particular to assess effectiveness and impact of the programme;
- an evidence when planning future policies and programmes.

An Evaluation plan is a strategic document which describes how and which evaluations will be carried out through the whole programming period taking into account programme needs and available budget.

The Managing Authority (hereinafter MA) has the overall responsibility for the preparation and planning of evaluations by drafting an evaluation plan which is to be submitted to the Joint Monitoring Committee (hereinafter JMC) for examination and approval no later than one year after the adoption of the Programme.

This Evaluation plan covers Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020 and it has been prepared in line with the provisions of Articles 54, 56, 110 and 114 of Regulation No 1303/2013, Article 41 of Regulation No 447/2014 and following the guidance and trainings provided by the EC and INTERACT.

The Evaluation plan has been submitted to the JMC on 24 August 2016 and approved by JMC decision from 7 September 2016, in line with Articles 110(2)(c) and 114(1) of Regulation No 1303/2013.

Following the adoption by the JMC, the Evaluation plan will be sent to the European Commission for information through SFC 2014. Information on the Evaluation plan will be published on the Programme website.

2. Programme context

Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020 (hereinafter the Programme) is a cooperation programme that provides an opportunity for both participating countries to continue their cross-border cooperation established within 2007-2013 Programme in order to further strengthen and extend the scope of cooperation within the framework of this Programme.

The aim of this Programme is to strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the Programme area through implementation of joint interventions in the areas of health and social care, environment protection and sustainable energy, development of sustainable tourism as well as sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage assets and strengthening of competitiveness and business environment.

The Programme area covers 4 counties on the north-east of Croatia (NUTS III regions): Osijek-Baranja County, Vukovar-Srijem County, Brod-Posavina County and Požega-Slavonia County, and 5 districts on north-west of Serbia (NUTS III regions): North Bačka District, West Bačka District, South Bačka District, Srem District and Mačva District.

Within four priority axes, the Programme defines five specific objectives that indicate specific changes that the Programme anticipates to achieve through implementation of specific actions and realization of related outputs.

Priority axis	Union support (EUR)	Specific objective
PA1 Improving the quality of public social and health services in the programme area.	EUR 5,143,980	1.1 To improve the quality of facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care
PA2 Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency.	EUR 12,002,616	2.1 To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring/ management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection.
		2.2 To promote use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency.
PA3 Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage.	EUR 7,544,500	3.1 To strengthen, diversify, integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets
PA4 Enhancing competitiveness and developing business environment in the	EUR 6,172,774	4.1. To improve competitiveness of the programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters education and research

programme area.		organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products/services/patents/trademarks in the programme area
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The Programme is managed by the Agency for Regional Development of the Republic of Croatia. The MA is supported with respective National Authorities, Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds in Croatia and Serbian European Integration Office in Serbia.

3. Objectives, scope and coordination

3.1. Objectives and scope

Evaluation plan sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the Programme, taking into account the recommendations of the ex-ante evaluation of this Programme, the budgetary framework and the elements that are to be reported to the European Commission within annual (final) implementation reports.

Evaluation plan is also considered as a tool for Programme management and policy decisions to support the Programme implementation and its result orientation. It sets out the framework to properly plan and implement quality Programme evaluations with the aim to secure and improve the Programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

The main objectives of the Evaluation plan are the following:

- to improve the quality of evaluations through proper planning, identification and collection of necessary data;
- to enable informed Programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings;
- to provide a framework to plan impact evaluations;
- to ensure that evaluations provide inputs for annual/final implementation reports;
- to facilitate the synthesis of findings from different Member States by the Commission and the exchange of available data;
- to ensure that resources for funding and managing the evaluations are appropriate.

The Evaluation plan should also ensure that the essential material is available in time for the MA to meet its obligation laid down in Article 114(2) of Regulation No 1303/2013 to submit to

the European Commission a report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period, by 31 December 2022.

This description of planned evaluations for the whole programming period is indicative. Taking into account that new evaluation needs might occur during programme lifetime, the Evaluation plan shall be reviewed by the JMC.

3.2. Coordination with other programmes and initiatives

MA will ensure coordination and synergy with other Interreg and mainstream programmes as well as other institutions from the Programme area which are carrying out evaluations, in order to expand the evaluation perspective, enrich results of the evaluation activities and avoid duplications. The MA will regularly cooperate with other relevant bodies responsible for management and implementation of EU programmes and initiatives (e.g. Ministry for Regional Development and EU Funds as the coordination body for EU Funds in the Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, etc.). For this purpose the MA will also collect information from Serbian National Authority on the evaluations carried out on the Serbian part of the Programme area.

4. Evaluation framework

4.1. Responsibilities and evaluation process

The MA shall ensure that the resources for funding and managing evaluations are available and appropriate in line with Article 56(2) of Regulation No 1303/2013.

The MA has the overall responsibility for drafting the Evaluation plan and for the evaluations carried out. The MA shall, in particular, provide the procedures, methodology and human resources necessary for support and carrying out evaluations, especially related to data collection.

In order to carry out evaluation activities the MA will use internal and external resources.

4.1.1. Internal resources

The Head of Directorate within the MA will be responsible for initiating, drafting and finalizing the Evaluation plan and for providing support and coordinating the evaluation process. Other MA/JS staff will be involved in evaluation activities, when necessary.

The MA will perform the following tasks:

- drafting the Evaluation plan based on the needs identified and submitting it to the JMC;
- updating and modifying the Evaluation plan (e.g. based on instructions and comments by the JMC);
- submitting the Evaluation plan and evaluation findings to the EC;
- managing procurement procedures and contracts for evaluation activities (preparing tender documentation and drafting the Terms of Reference for the evaluation process, participating in the process of selection of the external evaluators);
- organizing and participating at the kick-off meeting with the external evaluators;
- coordinating and monitoring the evaluation process and ensuring the quality of the conclusions and recommendations (monitoring progress in the evaluation process by examining progress reports and other outputs submitted by evaluators);
- collecting the relevant data and providing documents and other information at the request of external evaluators (e.g. defining the proper source of data, communication with public and regional authorities);
- participating in training and evaluation capacity building activities (seminars, workshops, etc.);
- participating in revising the Programme indicators and intervention logic, if applicable;
- participating in the evaluation of the Communication Strategy and Annual Communication Plan;
- participating in coordination activities with other programmes and initiatives;
- participating in communications activities related to the dissemination of evaluation results (e.g. presenting the evaluation results at JMC meetings and/or Programme events);
- participating in drafting the reports to be submitted to the EC (annual/final implementation report and report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period, etc.).

The members of MA/JS staff have participated in various workshops on evaluation (programme evaluation, drafting the evaluation plan and impact evaluations organised by INTERACT). If necessary, other relevant trainings will be attended in order to maintain and improve the expertise on evaluation. Training programmes attended by the MA/JS staff shall be covered from the TA budget allocated to capacity building of staff.

4.1.2. External resources

In accordance with Article 41(1) of Regulation No 447/2014, the evaluations may be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for the Programme implementation. Taking into account that the structure of MA does not foresee functionally independent unit responsible for evaluation, evaluations of the Programme will be carried out by external (independent) experts.

External experts will be selected on the basis of transparent public procurement procedure launched by the MA.

The MA will held a kick-off meeting with the external experts (evaluators), which will serve as a starting point to present the MA requirements from the whole evaluation process in detail.

The MA will provide additional support to the evaluators, in particular regarding information and data needed for carrying out evaluations.

4.1.3. Joint Monitoring Committee

In line with Article 16 of Regulation No 240/2014, the MA will involve the relevant partners in the evaluation of the Programme within the framework of the JMC and specific working groups which the JMC may establish for this purpose.

The JMC is composed of representatives of relevant national and regional authorities of the Participating Countries and other stakeholders, including civil society and private sector organisations. In addition to the JMC members, representatives of other relevant institutions may participate as observers.

The JMC has a steering and deciding role as regards the development, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the Evaluation plan. The JMC examines and approves the Evaluation plan and any of its amendments in line with Article 110(2)(c) of Regulation No 1303/2013.

The JMC shall review the Evaluation plan annually, in order to ensure that needs in terms of evaluation activities are reflected in the plan.

The JMC may make observations regarding Programme evaluation and shall monitor the actions taken as a result of its observations. The MA is in charge for the implementation of such observations.

4.2. Quality Management Strategy

The quality of evaluations depends on the precision and quality of Terms of Reference (ToR), which set the basis for the work of evaluation experts.

In accordance with Section 4.1.1., the MA is responsible for preparing the tender documentation for the procurement of external experts, in particular for drafting ToR. ToR will describe in detail the evaluation tasks; the evaluation questions, the preferred methodology, the timeframe, the conditions and expectations concerning the competences of the evaluator, the expected results of the evaluation process, etc.

The expertise needed for the evaluations has to be linked to competences in relation to the Programme area and specific competences related to qualitative evaluation methodologies.

The tender for the selection of external experts will be broadly disseminated using the Programme website and social media in order to ensure quality of proposals.

The MA will be responsible for assessing the offers against the criteria set out in the ToR. The MA will ensure that the award criteria are not solely based on the price, but on clear and objective qualitative criteria.

The Head of Directorate within the MA will be in charge for examination and control of Inception Report, Progress Reports and Final Report, as well as other outputs of the evaluation process, while the Head of MA will be responsible for verification of the mentioned documents and outputs.

The main expected outputs produced by the evaluators are the following:

- Inception Report presenting the detailed methodology and timeframe, including workflow;
- Progress Reports providing an overview of the work carried out by due dates in accordance with the ToR (preliminary conclusions and results of specific tasks);
- Final Evaluation Report providing a comprehensive picture of the evaluation including its context and objectives, evaluation methods and information sources, the results, conclusions and recommendations on all evaluation questions as defined in the ToR and further detailed in the Inception report. It will also include an executive summary.

4.3. Data collection

The MA is in charge for the establishment of monitoring mechanisms for the Programme implementation which will provide the evaluators reliable data for the evaluation activities. The main monitoring tool for the Programme is electronic monitoring system (eMS) which will also be used for data collection.

The main methods for data collection shall include desk research and data analysis of the project progress reports, annual implementation reports and statistical data from relevant national and/or EU databases (e.g. Eurostat). Progress reports shall be designed to support Programme evaluations and provide the necessary information concerning outputs and results, horizontal principles, target groups, etc.

To perform the evaluation of the Programme Communication Strategy the evaluators will use the data provided by the Programme website, social media and outputs from the Programme events (e.g. number of visits to the website, number of registries at the partner search, number of downloads, evaluation forms, etc.).

Additionally, external evaluators may decide to conduct interviews or surveys involving Programme staff, JMC members, beneficiaries and stakeholders. In that case, specific questionnaires may be designed, with the support of the MA, if necessary.

4.4. Communication and use of the evaluation findings

The Programme will use the evaluation outcomes as a tool to improve the implementation of the Programme, to enhance the Programme results, to achieve the Programme indicators and to help the development of the future Programme.

Evaluation findings shall be communicated to several target groups having in mind different communication methods for different target groups and specific requirements of each target group.

1. European Commission

The Evaluation plan, as well as all evaluation reports shall be submitted to the European Commission through SFC 2014.

Progress in the implementation of the Evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities (when available) will be reported in the Annual implementation report for

the years 2017 and 2019, and the Final implementation report, in line with Article 50 of Regulation No 1303/2013.

Additionally, by 31 December 2022, the MA will submit to the EC a report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the Programme period, in line with Article 114(2) of Regulation No 1303/2013.

2. Joint Monitoring Committee

In addition to the obligation laid down in Article 114(1) of Regulation No 1303/2013, the MA shall also submit to the JMC for examination progress in the implementation of the Evaluation plan and the follow up given to evaluation findings, in line with Article 110(1) of Regulation No 1303/2013.

3. Stakeholders and general public

In line with the requirements set in Article 41 of Regulation No 447/2014, the Evaluation plan and the outcomes of the evaluations (Final evaluation report) shall be published on the Programme website <http://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/>.

In addition, the Programme will promote the evaluation findings through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. social media and Programme events) as they are foreseen in the Communication Strategy.

Programme Communication Manager will be in charge for the dissemination of evaluation results to the general public.

5. Planned evaluations

In line with Article 56(3) of Regulation No 1303/2013, the MA shall ensure that evaluations assess Programme effectiveness, efficiency and impact. At least once during the programming period an impact evaluation must be carried out in order to assess how support from the European Structural & Investment (ESI) Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority. Impact evaluation shall cover all priority axes and specific objectives of the Programme.

Based on the legal requirements, Programme specific needs and the available financial resources, the following evaluations are planned to be carried out in financial period 2014-2020:

- Evaluation of the Programme efficiency and effectiveness shall focus on the evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the Programme management and procedures (management structure, coordination between bodies, monitoring system, etc.) and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the Programme Communication Strategy.
- Impact evaluation shall focus on the evaluation of Programme's performance as regards to each specific objective and evaluation of how support from ERDF/IPA II has contributed to the objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

5.1. Methodology for impact evaluations

According to the European Commission Guidance on Evaluation Plans, there are two main methods that can be used for conducting impact evaluation of the programme:

1. Theory-based impact evaluation

The impact of the programme intervention is evaluated primarily on a qualitative basis, which includes methodological techniques such as desk research, interview, surveys and focus groups conducted with programme stakeholders, case studies of implemented projects and other methods that external evaluators find relevant for collecting required data. The main questions that the theory-based impact evaluation is seeking to answer are why and how the programme intervention functions.

2. Counterfactual impact evaluation

This method is based on comparing a group of stakeholders embraced by projects financially supported by the programme with a control group that is not targeted by the programme intervention. The main questions that the counterfactual impact evaluation is seeking to answer are how much of the change is caused by the programme intervention and for whom.

Given that counterfactual method is complex and requires significant resources, the theory-based approach will be applied for evaluating the impact of the Programme.

The external evaluators will be required to create a proposal of the evaluation process, which shall include the description of the method to be applied and sources of data to be drawn upon.

5.2. Budget and timing

Based on the estimated needs and overall budget from Technical Assistance of the Programme, approximately 80.000,00 EUR is allocated to evaluations for the whole programming period 2014-2020. This amount covers the cost of external experts and data collection, if necessary.

The timetable of evaluations is prepared taking into account the size and scope of the Programme, the reporting requirements of the Programme towards the EC, as well as the fact that projects from the 1st Call for Proposals will not start before first quarter of 2017. Therefore, no evaluations are planned in 2017 and in first half of 2018.

The timing and the budget of the planned evaluations are indicated in the table below:

Planned evaluation	Timing ¹	Indicative budget	Reporting
Evaluation of the Programme efficiency and effectiveness	October 2018 - April 2019	EUR 40.000,00	Annual Implementation Report to be submitted by 30 June 2019
Impact evaluation	October 2019 – April 2020	EUR 40.000,00	Report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programme period to be submitted by 31 December 2022 Final Implementation Report

5.3. Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions serve as a tool to better define the evaluation requirements and to determine what kind of data need to be collected and when. These questions are only indicative and they will be further specified in the ToR for the selection of external evaluators.

¹ Includes the period from the Kick-off meeting until the submission of the Final Report.

1. Evaluation of the Programme efficiency and effectiveness including the evaluation of the Programme Communication Strategy

The following questions shall be covered by the evaluation of the Programme efficiency and effectiveness:

- Are the Programme management mechanisms suitable to implement the Programme?
- Are the human resources adequate for Programme management?
- Was the Programme efficient considering the steps taken from launching the call for proposals to contracting projects?
- Are the procedures for monitoring the Programme suitable for collecting the necessary data?
- Are the Programme procedures efficient and without delays in respecting the deadlines set by the EU Regulations and set by the Programme authorities internally?
- Is the Programme Communication Strategy efficient in relation to Programme promotion and Interreg branding?
- Were Programme events successful in attracting new project partners and dissemination of information to new target groups?

2. Impact evaluation of the Programme

These three overall questions shall be covered by the Impact evaluation of the Programme:

- Are the financial resources divided per priority axes consistent with the funds requested by the applicants?
- Did the planned measures/projects successfully contribute to Programme horizontal principles?
- Did the projects manage to achieve the expected Programme outputs and results?

In addition to the overall questions, the following specific questions related to each priority axis shall be covered by the Impact evaluation:

Priority axis	Specific objective	Indicative evaluation questions
PA1 Improving the quality of public social and health services in the programme area.	1.1 To improve the quality of facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care	Did the Programme interventions manage to introduce new services and skills in the area of health and social care? To what extent has the availability of services enhanced due to activities funded by the Programme?
PA2 Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency.	2.1 To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring/ management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection.	Did the projects manage to achieve the expected Programme result? To what extent has the risk management enforced due to activities funded by the Programme? How did the Programme interventions affect environment and biodiversity?
	2.2 To promote use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency.	Did the projects manage to develop new energy solutions? Can any changes in the awareness among public be identified as a result of sustainable energy promotion?
PA3 Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage.	3.1 To strengthen, diversify, integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets	Did the Programme interventions manage to introduce new tourism products and services in the Programme area? What kinds of stakeholders have been influenced by the Programme?
PA4 Enhancing competitiveness and developing business environment in the programme area.	4.1. To improve competitiveness of the programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products/services/patents/trademarks in the programme area	What kind of new products/services/ patents/trademarks were introduced in the Programme area? How did the Programme interventions affect the competitiveness of the Programme area?