

**Interreg**



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**Central Baltic Programme**

# **EVALUATION PLAN**

**for the Central Baltic programme 2021 - 2027**

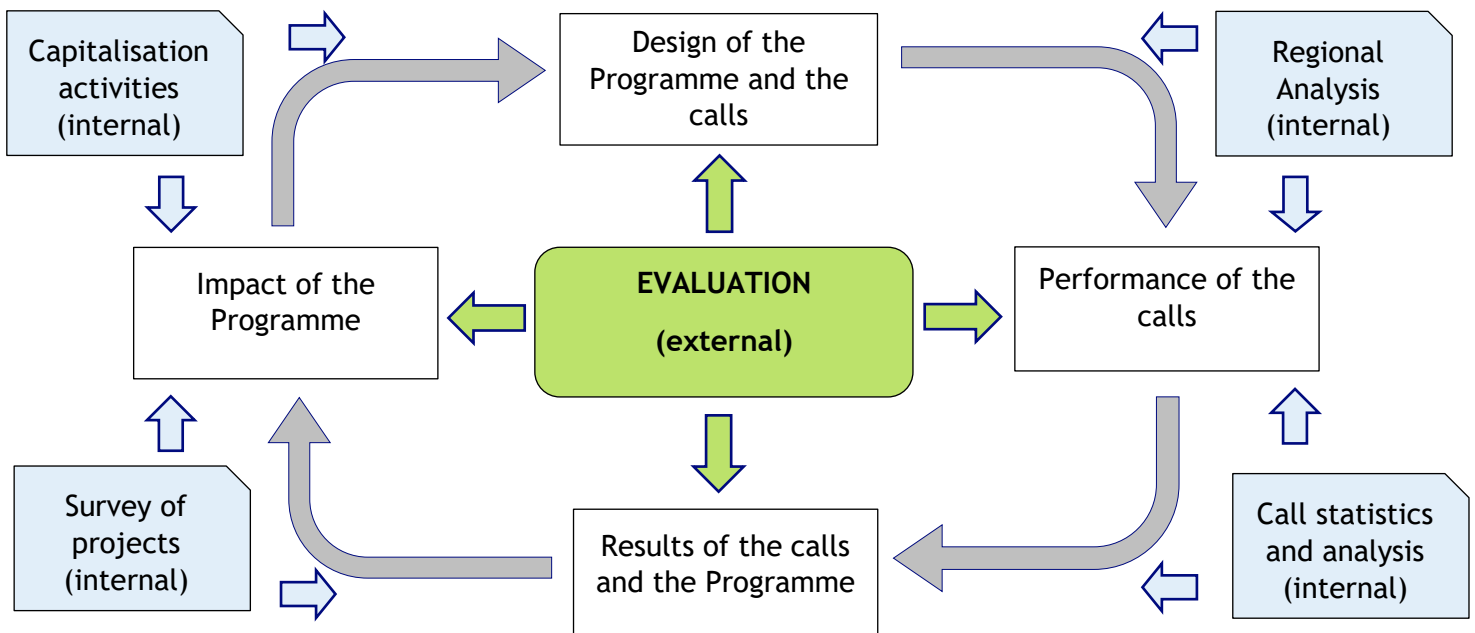
Version 1.1 (16.12.2022)

## Foreword

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, or results of an initiative for the purposes of learning or decision-making. It is a key dimension of cohesion policy-making as it supports policy design and implementation with robust evidence on the outcomes and impacts of the interventions<sup>1</sup>.

Evaluation plan for programme period 2021 - 2027 is set-up to ensure added value and value for money, and to complement other activities performed by both Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat. It relies on previous experience within Central Baltic programme, other Interreg programmes and considers the best practice in evaluating interventions across European Union. It ensures that the evaluation topics and questions covered takes into account findings of evaluations of Central Baltic programme performed in previous programme periods. The experience gained working with evaluation results in previous programme periods (both by Central Baltic programme itself and other actors like performance audits by European Court of Auditors) is considered planning both evaluation budget and topics to be covered within certain types of evaluations foreseen for programme period 2021 - 2027 as well as timing of the evaluations to ensure that evaluation results are to be used to learn and improve the programme design, implementation, and results.

Evaluation plan therefore is set-up to cover evaluations foreseen to be performed by external evaluation experts. As such these external evaluations will complement activities performed by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat in regards of internal analytics and assessment of, for example, the design of the programme and calls, implementation and performance of calls and projects, achievement of results by projects and programme.



Picture 1 Complementarities between external evaluation and analytics by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat

<sup>1</sup> definition of evaluation from Evaluation Society of Canada. Role of evaluation as described by the European Commission in the Staff working document for 2021 – 2027 period.

Evaluation plan has been drawn to ensure the flexibility needed due to current circumstances outside of influence of the Central Baltic programme like the rising energy prices, Russian war in Ukraine, as well other socio-economic, demographic, and environmental challenges. Therefore, the evaluation topics and timing is set to be indicative and could be adjusted to meet the needs to respond to those circumstances and challenges as well in case necessary.

To ensure the flexibility, it is foreseen, for example, that Monitoring Committee as the body responsible for adopting the Evaluation plan and its amendments as well as for follow-up of evaluation results, revises the evaluation plan once a year and during the revision proposes amendments to the evaluation plan, evaluation topics, evaluation questions, timing and budget of evaluations to ensure that Central Baltic programme meets the demand from region's stakeholders and contributes to making Central Baltic region prosperous for its citizens and businesses.

## 1. Introduction - objectives, coverage, coordination

This evaluation plan is prepared for the Central Baltic programme 2021 - 2027<sup>2</sup>. The evaluation plan is drawn up according to the Article 35 of the Interreg regulation for programming period 2021 - 2027<sup>3</sup> and considering the European Commission's guidance document<sup>4</sup>.

Objective of the evaluation plan is to support the result-orientation and the impact of the Programme as well as to improve the quality of the design and implementation of the Programme.

Aim of the evaluation plan is to ensure that systematic assessment of the Programme using evaluation techniques and methodologies is taking place and thus provides evidence on relevance, complementarity, effectiveness, efficiency, and the impact of the support provided by the Programme for purposes of learning, further development of the Programme and for purposes of the communication of results and impact of the Programme.

This evaluation plan covers Programme period 2021 - 2027. The evaluation plan acknowledges that for the purpose of providing evidence on wider socio-economic impact of the Programme as well the impact of the projects supported by the Programme, project results from previous programming periods across intervention themes, namely the 2007 - 2013 and 2014 - 2020, are as well relevant for evaluations foreseen in this evaluation plan.

Evaluation plan is the framework document for the purposes of evaluation. It sets up the evaluation framework, evaluation process, parties involved, their responsibilities, as well it introduces the evaluations planned.

Evaluation plan is drawn up by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat of the Programme.

## 2. Evaluation framework

By evaluation in the context of Central Baltic programme a systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and results of the Programme for the purposes of learning and decision-making is understood. It requires usage of appropriate evaluation techniques, involvement of internal and external expertise, ensuring appropriate information and data for the purposes of the evaluation, as well as communication and follow-up of evaluation results.

### 2.1. Evaluation process

Evaluation activities are coordinated by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat of the Programme. Monitoring Committee has the authority to decide on evaluation issues like adoption of the evaluation plan and any amendments to it, carrying out evaluations, and taking follow-up

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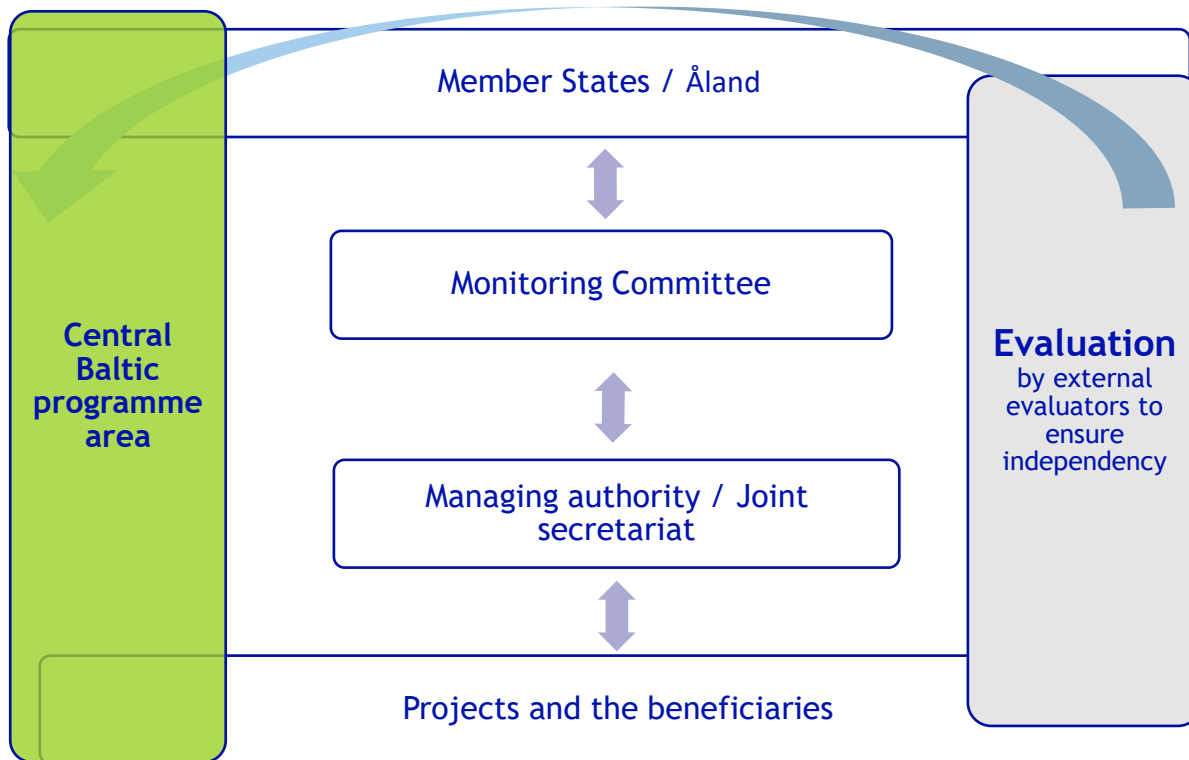
<sup>2</sup> further referred as Programme

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments

<sup>4</sup> Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2021) 198 final of 8.7.2021 *Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund,*

*the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027*

actions based on evaluation results (conclusions and recommendations from evaluations carried out). Picture 1 introduces the evaluation approach and stakeholders involved.



Picture 2 Programme’s approach to evaluation

Programme’s approach to evaluation includes two sides of the evaluation process: first, it includes the roles, responsibilities, and procedures described below which forms the basis for methodologically sound evaluations leading to the use of evaluation results; second, it includes the scope of the evaluation and reflects the importance of evaluation in learning process to determine the impact the Programme brings to the Central Baltic region.

Responsibilities and roles of stakeholders involved in evaluation activities are described below.

Managing Authority together with Monitoring Committee is responsible that sufficient amount of technical assistance budget is available for evaluation purposes.

Evaluation plan is the framework document for the purposes of evaluation. It sets up the evaluation framework, evaluation process, parties involved, their responsibilities, as well it introduces the evaluations planned.

Evaluation plan is drawn up by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat of the Programme. Draft evaluation plan is then submitted to the Monitoring Committee for revision and adoption. Monitoring Committee reviews the draft evaluation plan as soon as it is submitted and adopts it in case no amendments are needed. In case of amendments, Managing Authority / Joint secretariat prepares the amendments and resubmits to the Monitoring Committee for adoption. Evaluation plan is adopted by the decision of the Monitoring Committee. After evaluation plan is

adopted by the Monitoring Committee, Managing Authority submits it to the European Commission for information.

It is Managing Authority's / Joint Secretariat's responsibility to follow the evaluation plan in carrying out evaluations according to the time schedule and the coverage / scope agreed. In case Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat sees the necessity for changing the evaluation timing and / or scope, evaluation plan should be amended accordingly, and following the procedure described above.

For each of the evaluations planned Managing Authority forms a technical working group responsible for drafting evaluation Terms of reference (ToR) and tendering out external evaluation experts, if so agreed. Managing Authority ensures contracting out of evaluations in cases agreed and is responsible for managing the evaluations carried out by external evaluation experts. Managing Authority ensures that in case internal experts are involved in evaluation process, their expertise is independent from that of Managing Authority.

Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat ensures that monitoring data and information is available for purposes of evaluation. In appropriate cases, other stakeholders (incl. project partners, beneficiaries of the projects, Audit Authority, first level controllers, national, regional, or local institutions, etc.) may be invited to provide data or information for evaluation purposes. In such cases, Managing Authority sends information request on behalf of external evaluators to provide necessary data and information or asks the stakeholders to co-operate with external evaluators for purposes of evaluation.

Evaluation report shall present main evaluation results - main findings backed by results of an independent, in-depth analysis carried out using proper evaluation techniques, and recommendations as an evaluation follow-up.

Managing Authority / Joint secretariat presents evaluation results of each evaluation to the Monitoring Committee. External evaluation experts may be invited to support the Managing authority / Joint secretariat to the Monitoring Committee meeting. Monitoring Committee reviews the evaluation results and invites Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat to prepare follow-up actions in case found relevant. Follow-up actions are agreed by Monitoring Committee and Managing Authority altogether. Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat informs the Monitoring Committee on follow-up actions as required on case by case basis.

It would be Managing Authority's / Joint Secretariat's responsibility to communicate evaluation results to stakeholders of any kind, and the public. This should be done as part of programme's communication strategy using relevant channels and ways of communicating. What should be admitted at this point is that communication of evaluation results may and should be different for different kind of target groups form and content wise.

All the evaluation reports will be made public by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat and published in the Programme's webpage [www.centralbaltic.eu](http://www.centralbaltic.eu). Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat will send all the evaluation reports or links to reports to the Commission.

Evaluations can be carried out involving both internal and external experts therefore it is of utmost importance to ensure that Managing Authority's / Joint Secretariat's staff has appropriate knowledge of evaluation techniques and their requirements as they are the primary means of ensuring quality of evaluations by managing the evaluations underway. It is planned that Interact provided training is the main source of knowledge in the field combined with trainings provided by the Commission. Participation in relevant evaluation seminars and

workshops may be considered as an option to increase the knowledge in the field of evaluations for those involved in technical working groups for particular evaluations.

Valuable source of knowledge in the field of evaluations are services provided by the Commission like the Evaluation Helpdesk under DG REGIO and the Centre for Research of Impact Evaluations (CRIE) under DG JRC. Co-operation with the experts of above-mentioned Commission services would benefit the Managing Authority's / Joint Secretariat staff dealing with evaluation issues.

## 2.2. Budget and schedule for evaluations

Evaluations are financed from the budget of technical assistance to the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat of the Programme. Evaluation budget for programming period 2021 - 2027 is up to 200 000 EUR. Evaluation budget will cover the cost of evaluations, data collection, training, as well as any other evaluation costs those would arise.

In respect to the size of the Programme, up to 2 evaluations per programming period are an optimal number of evaluations to ensure that robust evidence on the outcomes and impacts of the interventions is produced supporting policy design and implementation of the Programme.

First of the two evaluations thus would be optimal to focus on programme design, project selection, communication, and project implementation (project management) processes of the Programme so that valuable evidence on the relevance, coherence, complementarity, and effectiveness of the Programme can be made. The most optimal timing for implementation type of evaluation would be 3 - 4 years after the launch of the Programme<sup>5</sup>. As the evaluation results from this evaluation would be available in about 9 - 12 months' time thus coinciding with the early start for programming the next programming period, i.e., the 2028 - 2034 programming period, it is seen relevant to include evaluation questions in respect to the wider impact of the Central Baltic programme as well as they can bring valuable input for programming purposes.

Second of the two evaluations would be reasonably to focus on impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and Union added value aspects of the Programme and is planned for years 2028 - 2029. It is expected that at that time all the projects will be finished or in their closing phase, or close to that and thus it is relevant to go into details of what and for whom has been achieved with the help of the Programme at that stage. At this stage is relevant as well once again to revisit the relevance, coherence, complementarity, and visibility aspects of the Programme, as well those of European Union wide horizontal importance aspects like non-discrimination, gender equality, climate change, digital transformation.

## 2.3. Data and information requirements

Besides programming information on programme intervention logic, and monitoring information on indicators, projects, their beneficiaries, and results, especially for the purposes of impact evaluations, additional information is required. This is mostly related to the performance of the beneficiaries or the services and sites supported. In many cases, this would require at least the following to be known: the performance situation of the beneficiary or the service or the site at the time when support is started and at least one year after the support has stopped. The performance situation appropriate time before would be relevant as well.

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<sup>5</sup> Programme has been launched on 15 November 2021 pending approval from the Commission which is expected at the first half of 2022

The performance situation of the beneficiaries and the services and sites supported should be collected or noticed during the programming period. It is therefore of utmost importance that projects collect / notice the performance information on behalf of the Programme both on the beneficiaries and the services and sites supported.

For beneficiaries like SMEs, companies, and individuals the required information would consist of their names, contact details (email address or a phone number), situation of the beneficiary (i.e., start-up, unemployed, etc.), support received, period of the support (start and end date), result of support (i.e., contracts, visits, training provided, etc.). A predefined form developed by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat is planned to be used for this purpose. This would allow the evaluators to contact the respective beneficiaries and to ask for additional information, as it would allow the evaluators to collect the information on beneficiaries from public data registers regarding their performance details.

For beneficiaries like services and sites the required information would consist of the name and provider of the service or the address of the site, ownership of the service or site, support received, period of support (start and end date), situation of the service or site (new, scaled-up, hazardous toxins, etc.), support received, period of support (start and end date), result of support (i.e., new features created, new target groups reached, service upgraded, site upgraded, etc.), the impact of the support (i.e., user numbers, CO2 emissions, etc.). A predefined form developed by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat could be used for this purpose. This would allow the evaluators to contact the respective service providers or site owners and to ask for additional information regarding the performance details.

### 3. Planned evaluations

List and timetable of the evaluation to be carried out throughout the programming period as well as additional information is to be found below.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> evaluation - Evaluation during the programming period

Evaluation title (indicative)*	Does the result-orientational approach and focused scope of the Central Baltic programme provide financing opportunities for change within selected areas in the Central Baltic programme area?
evaluation type	mid-term evaluation of 2021 - 2027 programme combined with wider impact evaluation of the Central Baltic programme
duration and tentative date	9 - 12 months, starting late 2025 -early 2026, results to be available at the end of 2026 / beginning of 2027 at latest i.e., before the programming of next period programme starts)
subject and themes covered	programme design, project selection, communication, and project implementation (project management) processes of the Programme combined with wider impact of the Central Baltic programme
rationale for themes covered	At this stage it is necessary that the evidence on the relevance, coherence, complementarity, and effectiveness of the Programme becomes evident so that any possible changes in the Programme intervention logic, implementation and project management can still be made in case relevant. Since the next programming cycle will be approaching, results will be used for programming purposes for the 2028 - 2034 programming period. Determining net impact of the programme is relevant for both programming purposes as those will guide intervention logic,



	programme priorities, and focussing of the Programme in negotiations with Member states and the Commission.
estimated budget	100 000 EUR
approach	process and impact evaluation
main (indicative) guiding evaluation questions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the programme objective relevant to the current and upcoming needs and challenges in the region? What kind of other needs and challenges might there be relevant for the Central Baltic programme?</li> <li>• Are the programme objectives coherent with other funding opportunities in the region (based on needs and challenges identified)? Do the funding opportunities complement each other?</li> <li>• What is the coherence and complementarity of the Central Baltic programme with other European territorial cooperation programmes in the region?</li> <li>• To what extent does the assessment procedures allow for selection of programme objective and according to region's needs and challenges relevant projects? Is the assessment procedure clear, understandable and transparent to project applicants? Are there possibilities for improvement of assessment methodology?</li> <li>• To what extent does Jems allows for easy and efficient implementation, monitoring, and reporting procedures for Managing authority, Joint secretariat as well as projects in implementation? What are the most common barriers and obstacles to that and are there possibilities for improvement of Jems functionality regarding implementation, monitoring, and reporting procedures for the Programme?</li> <li>• To what extent does Joint secretariat provide a clear, easy to understand and transparent guidance of the Programme procedures and to what extent does Joint secretariat provide support and feedback for project applicants and those in implementation phase? Are the procedures creating an unavoidable administrative burden to projects in implementation? Are there possibilities for any improvement regarding the above mentioned?</li> <li>• To what extent are the outcome and result indicators relevant to the programme objective and the needs and challenges in the regions? Are the procedures related to reporting the indicator values clear, easy to follow and understandable for projects in implementation? Are there possibilities for improvement regarding the indicators?</li> <li>• Do the communication activities and tools serve the objectives of the programme? Are the different communication activities and tools of the programme, implemented in an effective and efficient way ensuring the visibility of the programme and other aims of the communication?</li> <li>• What is the net impact of Central Baltic programme up to now in different sectors of economy and in different regions? What is the visibility of the Central Baltic programme? To what</li> </ul>

	extent are the results of finished projects sustainable? Are there any improvement possible to ensure the sustainability, durability, and usability of CB project results in areas of programme objectives?
methods to be used**	theory-based process and impact evaluation methods including reconstruction of programme intervention logic and theory of change, desk research, interviews, surveys, case studies
data requirements	For process evaluation - programming documents and monitoring information For impact evaluation - monitoring information, list of projects and beneficiaries within
data availability	Programming documents, monitoring information and contacts of projects will be provided mainly by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat. Information on beneficiaries to be requested from project partners, mainly lead partners of finished projects

\* evaluation title and evaluation questions will be elaborated further within Terms of Reference

\*\* methods to be used will be specified within Terms of Reference and is subject to the agreement with external evaluation experts related to the proposals during the procurement phase

## 2<sup>nd</sup> evaluation - Impact evaluation at the end of the programme

Evaluation title (indicative)*	What are the changes Central Baltic programme 2021 - 2027 has brought to the Central Baltic programme area and possibly beyond in different sectors of economy?
evaluation type	impact evaluation of the 2021 - 2027 programme
duration and tentative date	9 - 12 months, starting first half of 2028, results to be available until 30 June 2029 at latest
subject and themes covered	impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and Union added value of the Programme as well as revisiting relevance, coherence, and complementarity of the Programme in case changes has been made to Programme intervention logic or implementation procures as a result of the 1 <sup>st</sup> evaluation complemented with European Union wide horizontal aspects like non-discrimination, gender equality, climate change, digital transformation
rationale for themes covered	It is expected that at this time all the projects will be finished or in their closing phase, or close to that and thus it is relevant to go into details of what and for whom has been achieved with the help of the Programme at that stage. At this stage is relevant as well once again to revisit the relevance, coherence, complementarity, and visibility aspects of the Programme in case changes has been made to Programme intervention logic or implementation procedures as result of the 1 <sup>st</sup> evaluation. European Union wide horizontal importance aspects like non-discrimination, gender equality, climate change, digital transformation is to be included so that Programme's coherence with European Union policy is ensured.
estimated budget	100 000 EUR
approach	process and impact evaluation
main (indicative) guiding evaluation questions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes are for whom has the Programme brought in different sectors of economy and in different regions? Are the changes equally divided between programme area and programme objectives? Are there any obstacles by sectors, programme objectives, and Programme area for bringing</li> </ul>

	<p>changes? What and to what extent has been done and what and to what should be done by different stakeholders of the Programme to overcome those obstacles?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the project results cost-efficient by different sectors of economy, programme objectives and programme area? What factors have ensured the cost-efficiency of the programme and opposite? What and to what extent has been done and what and to what extent should be done by different stakeholders to ensure most of cost-efficiency?</li> <li>• What has been the progress of reaching programme’s aims and objectives? What obstacles have there been by different sectors of economy, programme objectives and programme area? What and to what extent has been done and what and to what extent should be done by different stakeholders to ensure the reaching of programme’s aims and objectives?</li> <li>• Have the projects been implemented in a manner ensuring timely and focused reach of project results in all programme objectives and in all programme area? What and to what extend has been done and what and to what extent should be done by different stakeholders to ensure project implementation in a manner ensuring reach of timely and focused project results?</li> <li>• Are the cross-border elements present and visible in project results in all programme objectives and in all programme area? Have the Programme procedures ensured cross-border cooperation and cross-border project results to be in place in all programme objectives? What and to what extend should be done by Managing authority / Joint secretariat to improve cross-border elements in the Programme?</li> <li>• To what extent has the Programme contributed implementing European Union wide policies in fields of non-discrimination, gender equality, climate change, digital transformation? To what extent have the horizontal principles applied in the Programme helped to promote European values? Are there any other European Union policy Programme has contributed to? Are there any further measures needed to extend the Programme’s contribution implementing European Union wide policies?</li> </ul>
methods to be used**	theory-based process and impact evaluation methods including reconstruction of programme intervention logic and theory of change, desk research, interviews, surveys, case studies; counterfactual impact evaluation methods in case possible to apply
data requirements	For process evaluation - programming documents and monitoring information For impact evaluation - monitoring information, list of projects and beneficiaries within, data on beneficiaries’ performance
data availability	Programming documents, monitoring information and contacts of projects will be provided mainly by Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat. Information on beneficiaries to be requested from project partners, mainly lead partners of finished projects.

	Information on beneficiaries' performance (in case selected to apply within impact evaluation) to be collected from beneficiaries using the pre-defined forms. Information on control group for counterfactual impact evaluation (in case selected to apply) to be collected from data registers.
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\* evaluation title and evaluation questions will be elaborated further within Terms of Reference

\*\* methods to be used will be specified within Terms of Reference and is subject to the agreement with external evaluation experts related to the proposals during the procurement phase

Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat is responsible for ensuring use and follow-up of evaluation results. Evaluations will feed into programme implementation cycle as describe below.

Table 1. Programme implementation cycle and programme evaluation time schedule

Year of report submission	Programme implementation cycle	Programme evaluation
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of the Programme</li> </ul>	
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of the Programme by the Commission</li> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data*</li> <li>• Implementation of small projects starts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approvement of Evaluation plan</li> </ul>
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data*</li> <li>• Implementation of regular projects starts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up and impact evaluation of 2014 - 2020 programme*</li> </ul>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Start of programming of 2028 - 2034 programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process evaluation and net impact evaluation</li> </ul>
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	
2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Launch of 2028 - 2034 programme</li> </ul>	
2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Project implementation finishes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact evaluation</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Interreg regulation requires that each managing authority shall electronically transmit to the Commission cumulative data for the respective Interreg programme by 31 January, 30 April, 31 July, and 31 October of each year. Additionally, Interreg regulation allows that review may be organised by the Commission to examine the performance of Interreg programmes

<b>2030</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of Programme performance data by 31 January</li> </ul>
<b>2031</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final implementation report by 16 February</li> </ul>

\* Included for informative / visibility purposes only. Evaluation is scheduled according to Evaluation plan of 2014 - 2020 programme. Evaluation questions may be complemented with those similar to 2<sup>nd</sup> evaluation planned in 2021 - 2027 programme regarding impact of the 2014 - 2020 programme