

# Impact evaluation of the Interact Programme 2014-2020

Call for tenders

## Terms of Reference (ToR)

On behalf of the Interact Programme, Interact Office Viborg is inviting interested experts to submit proposals for conducting an evaluation of the impact of the programme's service delivery in 2014-2020.

In order to respond to this call for tenders, interested experts must demonstrate their experience, capacity and suggested approach to carrying out the evaluation in view of the specification presented in this Terms of Reference.

### 1. Background

#### About the Interact Programme

The Interact Programme is a cooperation programme under the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) objective of the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, and is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The Interact Programme provides exchange of experience, information and innovation in order to promote best practices and make cooperation easier. The programme delivers this through targeted events, publications and tools.

Interact services are targeted at cooperation programmes under the same ETC objective of the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 – known as Interreg. These programmes jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions in fields such as health, environment, research, education, transport, sustainable energy and more.

The current Interact III Programme builds on the successful implementation of INTERACT I and INTERACT II. In the 2014-2020 period, the programme focuses on three thematic objectives:

- 1) To improve the management and control capacity of Interreg programmes;
- 2) To improve Interreg's capacity to capture and communicate programme results;
- 3) To improve the cooperation management's capacity to implement innovative approaches.

These three objectives define the rationale behind Interact services implemented for the benefit of Interreg programmes of all strands: cross-border, transnational and interregional. The geographical area targeted by Interact services includes all Member States, Norway and Switzerland. In addition, the programme supports cooperation at the external borders of the European Union (Interreg-IPA CBC and ENI CBC). The programme's total budget is about EUR 46.3 million, of which 85% comes from ERDF.

The implementation structure and coordination framework of the Interact Programme is based on a decentralised model involving a central Managing Authority/Interact Secretariat located in Bratislava (Slovakia), and Interact Offices located in Turku (Finland), Viborg (Denmark), Vienna (Austria) and Valencia (Spain).

Further information and relevant documents concerning the Interact Programme can be found on the programme website: [www.interact-eu.net](http://www.interact-eu.net).

### **Regulatory framework for the evaluation**

The main EU legal provisions that regulate the evaluation process, and are relevant for the scope and contents of this assignment, are:

- Regulation (EC) No. 1303/2013, in particular Article 54 defining general provisions for the evaluation; Article 56 specifying requirements concerning evaluation during the programming period; Article 110 assigning responsibilities to the monitoring committee; and Article 114 on the evaluation process.
- Regulation (EC) No. 1299/2013, especially Preamble 26 on the responsibilities of the Managing Authority; and Article 14 defining requirements for submission of the programme implementation reports, including information in relation to the evaluation.

One aspect of the overall programme evaluation, as required by the regulations, is to assess the impact of the programme's interventions. With reference to the above-mentioned legal provisions, the Interact Programme has prepared an Evaluation Plan that specifies how the programme evaluation, including impact evaluation of the portfolio of Interact services, will be organised during the 2014-2020 period. The Interact Evaluation Plan can be found in the Annex to this tender document.

### **Conducted evaluations of Interact III**

Interact III is now approaching the end of its programming cycle, and the programme-wide impact evaluation is required to offer an overall reflection and assessment of the impact caused by the implementation of services throughout the programme period. At the same time, it is the third evaluation assignment to be carried out during Interact III.

In 2018-2019, the programme conducted a case-based impact evaluation of five selected projects – as a way of gathering early feedback on the impact of long-running services. The five projects were initiated before the start of the Interact III programme, and as such they

provided examples of intermediate impact that could be assessed as case studies. The case-based impact evaluation focused on the following projects implemented by Interact:

- Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT)
- Electronic monitoring system (eMS)
- keep.eu
- Harmonised Interreg branding
- Support to the implementation of macro-regional strategies.

In addition, an operational evaluation was conducted in 2020. This focused on assessing the programme's progress towards achieving its indicator targets, effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management system, and implementation of the programme's Communication Strategy.

The programme-wide impact evaluation must complement the above evaluations and build on the results presented in the case-based impact and operational evaluation final reports. Both reports are available on the Interact website (<https://www.interact-eu.net/#o=about>).

In particular, it is expected that the findings of the case-based impact evaluation are taken into account, in view of the results generated by the five projects in terms of changed practices and mind-sets, and impact on Interreg programmes and other stakeholders that go beyond capacity building. These impacts are expressed by an increased efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of Interreg programmes, and their resilience to deal with external change and pressure. While considering outcomes of the case-based impact evaluation, this programme-wide impact is to cover the entire scope of services delivered by Interact III.

## **2. Evaluation purpose and target audience**

### **Evaluation purpose**

The Evaluation Plan of Interact III (as approved by the Interact Monitoring Committee in 2016) foresees that a programme-wide impact evaluation will be carried out, with the focus on assessing the impact of services provided by Interact in the 2014-2020 period. The actual implementation of the Interact III programme started in 2016 and it will continue until late 2022; i.e., when the next Interact IV programme is expected to commence.

While addressing the breadth of services delivered by Interact III, the purpose of the evaluation is to appraise the impact of the programme in view of the programme's specific objectives. The evaluation should assess the impacts of Interact's services in the areas targeted by the specific objectives, and specifically focus on assessing the change in practices in Interreg programmes that Interact has contributed to through its services.

On the one hand, it is expected that the results of the impact evaluation will aim at providing the Interact programme bodies with a better understanding of the effects caused by the programme by delivering its services to the programme's target groups. Direct and indirect

effects, as well as the scale of impact by different services, should be analysed, helping to recognise diversities as regards the added-value offered by different services. On the other hand, the evaluation should provide narratives exemplifying achievements and supporting an understanding of what has worked best.

Consequently, information deriving from the evaluation (evaluation conclusions and recommendations, examples of success stories) should facilitate informed programme decisions on the basis of the evaluation findings, and support communication about the programme's achievements and effects of its interventions on its target groups. It is expected that outcomes of the evaluation will provide input to guide the service delivery of the Interact IV programme, and specifically the operational implementation of future services.

### **Target audience**

The Interact programme bodies (i.e., Interact Monitoring Committee, Managing Authority/Interact Secretariat, Interact Offices and their Hosting Institutions) will be the main direct users of the conclusions deriving from this evaluation. In addition, outcomes of the evaluation will be of interest for relevant EU institutions, Interact's participating countries who have financed the programme, as well as users of Interact services – including the bodies responsible for the implementation and management of Interreg programmes and other cooperation actors.

The results of the impact evaluation will be communicated to all stakeholders on the Interact website and social media.

### **3. Objectives and content of the assignment**

The Interact III impact evaluation aims to assess intended and unintended effects of the services delivered by the programme in the 2014-2020 period. Specifically, it is required to evaluate impact of the breadth of services on relevant target groups – by looking at how Interact's services are used by the programme's target groups and what effect their use has had on the capacities of Interreg programmes and other stakeholders in managing Interreg programmes.

The leading question to be addressed and answered by the evaluator is:

***How has Interact contributed to Interreg programmes and other relevant stakeholders being better off and to improving/changing their work practices?***

This question should be approached by evaluating impact in view of the specific objectives of the programme; i.e., changes brought about by Interact's interventions should be assessed for each of the specific objectives:

**Specific objective 1 (S01): To improve the management and control capacity of territorial cooperation programmes**

1. To what extent has Interact contributed to the improvement of the management and control capacity of Interreg programmes?
2. How have Interact's interventions addressing SO1 contributed to changes in terms of increases in effectiveness and efficiency to govern Interreg programmes?
3. What has been the impact of the Interact services aiming at teaching knowledge and skills development? How have the trainings provided by Interact under SO1 affected the programme's target groups?

**Specific objective 2 (SO2): To improve the territorial cooperation capacity in capturing and communicating the programme results**

1. To what extent has Interact contributed to the improvement of the capacity for capturing and communicating programme results?
2. How have Interact's interventions addressing SO2 contributed to changes in terms of increases in effectiveness and efficiency to govern Interreg programmes?
3. How have Interact's interventions addressing SO2 contributed to changes in terms of increases in visibility of Interreg as a whole?
4. What has been the impact of Interact services aiming at teaching knowledge and skills development? How have the trainings provided by Interact under SO2 affected the programme's target groups?

**Specific objective 3 (SO3): To improve the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches**

1. How has Interact supported Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders in implementing innovative approaches?
2. To what extent has Interact contributed to the improvement of the capacity of Interreg programmes and other cooperation stakeholders in implementing innovative approaches?
3. How have Interact's interventions addressing SO3 contributed to changes in terms of increases in effectiveness and efficiency to govern Interreg programmes?

It must be noted that apart from Interreg programmes, the target groups of interventions supporting specific objective 3 comprise of cooperation stakeholders other than Interreg; e.g., actors involved in the implementation of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes, etc.

In addition, the impact achieved in relation to specific objective 3 should be assessed in particular in view of the following approaches and mechanisms/frameworks/tools of cooperation: macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, financial instruments, EGTCs and cooperation actions in Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes – as the main innovative approaches mentioned in the Interact III programme document and as supported during the programme implementation.

While providing answers to the above questions, the evaluation should describe in both qualitative and quantitative terms:

- Relevance of services, including the relevance of the type/mode of interventions, communication and promotion to target groups;

- Efficiency in terms of proportionality between the resources used and their contribution to achieving the objectives;
- Target groups reached;
- Change of practice observed, including effects;
- Lessons learned;
- Testimonials from users.

The leading question stated at the beginning of this section and the further questions related to individual specific objectives form the overarching frame for the impact evaluation.

**Tenderers are expected to add further detail to the questions and/or present sub-questions in their offers** that will suggest how the impact of the programme's interventions will be studied and assessed.

While reflecting on the proposed sub-questions, it should be taken into account that Interact projects and services differ in nature and in the form they are used by the target groups. In addition, it should be acknowledged that interconnections exist between projects carried out by Interact, including dependencies between projects implemented under different specific objectives. This should be taken into account during the evaluation and when assessing the impacts achieved in each of the areas defined by the specific objectives.

The proposed sub-questions will be further discussed during the Inception phase, and the evaluators should remain flexible and accept adjustments to the proposed sub-questions, if so requested.

#### 4. Methodology

**The tools and methods tenderers plan to use for this evaluation should be specified by the tenderers in their offers.** The proposed methodology should be the most suitable and effective, in order to provide comprehensive answers to the evaluation questions, examples of success stories, conclusions and recommendations.

The use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is encouraged, and the approach can vary depending on the evaluation questions. The tenderers should, however, ensure that the collection of data includes consultation with a representative sample of Interact stakeholders (Interreg programmes and other stakeholders) – covering different functions related to the implementation and management of Interreg programmes (e.g.; Joint Secretariat, Managing Authority, Audit Authority, Controllers, etc.), and the wide geographical area of the Interact programme. In addition, in order to answer questions related to specific objective 3, the evaluator should ensure the engagement of relevant target groups in the evaluation process. The specification of target groups addressed under different Interact III specific objectives is presented in the Annex.

It is expected that methods such as surveys, interviews, focus groups and/or similar will be applied, in addition to desk research of relevant documents, data analysis, etc.

The proposal presented by tenderers should suggest the most appropriate methods and outline how different methods will be combined in order to reach the objectives of the evaluation.

The chosen expert will be provided with access to all necessary and available data and information for the purpose of the evaluation. Information included in the Annexes of this tender document and on the Interact website ([www.interact-eu.net](http://www.interact-eu.net)) is already at the disposal of tenderers. Other relevant information available at the programme level, as well as internal documents and data regularly collected by Interact as part of the programme implementation, will be made accessible to the evaluator through a dedicated Interact contact person(s).

Examples of the available data and information that will be provided include:

- Stakeholder contacts included in the Interact contact database (in accordance with GDPR);
- Outcomes of surveys carried out by the programme on the use of and satisfaction with Interact III services;
- Interact III Programme Guide;
- Interact III Multi-Annual Work Programme;
- Interact III Annual Implementation Reports;
- Interact III Communication Strategy and other communication material;
- Final reports of the Interact III case-based impact and operational evaluations;
- Other programme-level material relevant for the evaluation.

As part of this data and information sharing, clarification meetings (online) may be organised between the experts and dedicated Interact contact person(s).

While conducting this programme-wide impact evaluation, evaluators will be expected to build on the outcomes of the Interact case-based impact evaluation carried out in 2018-2019. Data collected during the case-based impact evaluation will also be made available as much as possible and as relevant for this assignment.

## **5. Working language**

The working language for the exchanges between Interact and the successful tenderer will be English. The evaluation reports and other deliverables should be provided in English.

## **6. Deliverables and timing**

During the assignment, the evaluators are expected to build up reliable evidence of the impact caused by the implementation of the breath of Interact services. Based on the evidence presented and analysed, the evaluators should provide answers to the evaluation questions. The conclusions of the evaluation should be concise analytical observations, and they should incorporate the evaluator's judgement based on recognised concepts/theories/experiences, as opposed to being purely a summary of the collected facts and opinions.

The following compulsory deliverables are to be submitted by the evaluator:

- Inception Report
- Presentation on the progress in implementation of the evaluation and initial observations to the Interact Monitoring Committee
- Draft Final Report
- Presentation of the Draft Final Report, main findings and recommendations to the Interact Monitoring Committee
- Final Report.

Apart from the above, tenderers may include in their proposals other deliverables in accordance with the proposed methodology, including those related directly to the leading evaluation question and/or questions concerning individual specific objectives.

The provisional timeframe for delivery of the required reports is presented in Table 1, below. In addition, before the end of the contract, the evaluator must release all documents and contents developed to Interact office Viborg. It is expected that the evaluators will delete all gathered data on completion of the tasks, in line with Art. 28 of the General Data Protection Regulation.

Indicatively, the impact evaluation will take place from the notification of the contract until June 2022. Three phases are planned during this period: inception phase, implementation phase and final phase.

### **Inception phase**

- A kick-off/inception meeting is expected to take place shortly after the contract has been signed. At this meeting all relevant elements of the assignment will be discussed, particularly the evaluation questions, methodological approach and detailed time plan, as well as specific contents of the tasks/activities that will be implemented. The selected expert must be willing to engage in a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) with Interact/Region Central Denmark (as the host organisation of Interact Office Viborg). In accordance with the EU Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR), the selected expert must subscribe a DPA that will define the modalities of personal data treatment accessed during the performance of its tasks. The DPA will regulate the treatment, deletion/return, hosting, possibilities of sub-processing, data breach obligation and audit rights of personal data processed by the expert on behalf of Interact.
- Following the inception meeting, the evaluator will be requested to provide an Inception Report within a month. This document must state in detail what is expected from this assignment, the points in time at which the different activities will be performed, and the process through which the evaluation reports will be produced. The Inception Report must describe, among others, the following:
  - the evaluation questions (listed and elaborated);
  - detailed information on the activities that will be carried out, together with the deliverables resulting from these activities;
  - detailed work plan of the evaluation tasks;
  - proposed source of information (including a list of available data considered necessary for the evaluation) and data collection procedure;

- role and responsibilities of each member of the evaluation team;
- description of the workflows and interactions with the Interact programme bodies;
- expected intermediary and final outputs.

### **Implementation phase**

- The stage of data collection is planned to run between September 2021 and February 2022, where different methods will be applied to source necessary information for the evaluation. Data available at the programme level will be made accessible to the evaluator through dedicated Interact contact persons. This includes documentation and statistical data provided by the Managing Authority/Interact Secretariat and the Interact Quality and Evaluation and Communication Managers, as well as access to information at the level of individual Interact Offices, as relevant and needed for the evaluation.
- Regular online coordination meetings with Interact should be foreseen by the evaluators to enable a close exchange on the progress of the work and intermediate results of the evaluation.
- The progress in implementation of the evaluation, together with initial observations, should be presented to the Interact Monitoring Committee at its meeting in December 2021.

### **Final phase**

- The Draft Final Report is expected in due time before the Interact Monitoring Committee meeting in May 2022, and at the latest one month before the date of the meeting. The Draft Final Report should present a concise synthesis of all findings, preliminary observations of the impact, and initial recommendations before they turn into specific and realistic suggestions for actions.
- The evaluator is supposed to present the Draft Final Report, main findings and recommendations to the Monitoring Committee at its meeting, scheduled for May 2022. The exact date of the meeting will be communicated to the experts as soon as it is available. It will take place online or in the Member State chairing the committee at the time of the meeting (Slovenia in January-June 2022).
- Any comments and suggestions by the Monitoring Committee should be incorporated as relevant to the Final Report, to be submitted by the end of June 2022, at the latest. The final reports should include, among others, the following:
  - executive summary;
  - evaluation purpose and methodology;
  - findings and conclusions;
  - recommendations.

Table 1: Foreseen provisional timeframe

Phase	Deliverable	Indicative timeframe
<b>Inception phase</b>	Signature of contract, Data Processing Agreement and start of assignment	August/September 2021
	Inception Meeting ( <i>online</i> )	September 2021
	Inception Report	September/October 2021
<b>Implementation phase</b>	Data collection	September 2021 – February 2022
	Presentation of the Inception Report, progress in implementation of the evaluation and initial observations at the Interact Monitoring Committee	December 2021
	Coordination meetings ( <i>online</i> )	September 2021 – February 2022
<b>Final phase</b>	Draft Final Report	April 2022 (one month before the Interact Monitoring Committee meeting)
	Presentation of the Draft Final Report, findings and recommendations at the Interact Monitoring Committee	May 2022
	Final Report	June 2022

Apart from the Inception meeting with the Interact programme, it is expected that regular coordination meetings will take place to communicate on the progress of the assignment and to receive early access to the evaluator's observations under development.

All meetings foreseen during the first stages of the evaluation should be organised online, with the possibility of meeting physically later in the process, and when the final conclusions and recommendations are being formulated. Physical presence will be requested if it is deemed necessary (e.g.; during the meeting of the Monitoring Committee). Interact can provide its platform for online meetings.

## 7. Requirements and professional competencies of the tenderer

In order to be considered for this assignment, the tenderer should demonstrate:

- Sound knowledge and proven professional experience in carrying out similar impact evaluations in relation to Interreg programmes;
- Knowledge of fundamental features of the EU Cohesion Policy, and of Interreg programmes in particular;
- Experience in data collection (both quantitative and qualitative data) and data analysis, and in drafting reports and recommendations;
- Fluency and proficiency in English;
- Knowledge of how to evaluate the effects of capacity-building, knowledge transfer, and networking activities (considered an advantage).

Should the tenderer propose a team of experts to carry out the evaluation, an experienced project manager should be appointed who will take the role of leader or be a coordinating expert. The project manager, as well as other members of the team, should:

- Hold a Master's degree or equivalent;
- Demonstrate proven experience in impact evaluation;
- Demonstrate proven experience in project management;
- Demonstrate proven experience in team management (concerns evaluation project manager).

Apart from the professional competencies of the evaluation team, the roles and responsibilities of all members should be clearly defined in the presented offer. In addition, the tenderer is expected to detail in the proposal the mechanism of quality assurance that will be used for implementation of the evaluation, and how quality standards will be ensured for each deliverable.

## 8. Selection procedure

Offers should be sent in English and by email only to Katerina Kring ([katerina.kring@interact-eu.net](mailto:katerina.kring@interact-eu.net)) by **6 August 2021 at noon (CET)** at the latest. Offers received after this deadline will not be considered.

Please note that any expenses you incur in the preparation of your offer will not be reimbursed.

### What to include in your offer:

- An introductory email, briefly explaining why you are interested in this assignment and what makes you/your company the ideal candidate for this job.
- In attachment to the introductory email:
  - Proposed initial concept for the delivery of the assignment (including evaluation questions), explanation of methods/methodology to be used, time plan and a clear indication of the members of the team delivering the various tasks.

- CV of each of the members of the team who are to deliver the work, including samples of previous work similar to the task detailed in this Terms of Reference.
- Financial proposal, indicating the total cost for the tasks required and the price per working day for each member of the team. The total price should include all cost involved in the delivery of the requested tasks, apart from any travelling and accommodation, which will be reimbursed by Interact separately against receipts.
- For orientation, Interact has calculated on spending an indicative amount of EUR 50.000 (excluding VAT) on this assignment.

### **Selection criteria**

The contract will be awarded to the bidder whose offer obtains the highest score, based on the following criteria:

- Understanding of the assignment, proposed concept, approach and methodology for carrying out the work: maximum 35p  
Points will be awarded by assessing the relevance of the proposed sub-questions; suitability of the methodology and work plan; and the respect of milestones/deliverables and the overall timeframe.
- Competencies of the tenderer and organisational capacity: maximum 35p  
The main requirements that will be assessed concerning this criterion include the competencies and experience of the tenderer in conducting impact evaluations, evaluations related to Interreg; experience in data collection and in drafting recommendations; and a coordination concept for managing implementation of the evaluation.
- Total price: maximum 30p  
Points under this criterion will be awarded based on the justification of the total price quoted and individual cost items; and consistency of the budget.

The winning expert is the one whose overall score is the highest. Should a contract not be signed, Interact can proceed to offer the contract to the second highest offer.

Interact reserves the right to cancel the selection procedure, if none of the offers scores at least 60p.

Questions about the content of this Terms of Reference should be sent to Petra Masáčová ([petra.masacova@interact-eu.net](mailto:petra.masacova@interact-eu.net)).

Please note that questions received prior to the deadline for submission of tenders and the respective answers will be published on Interact's website in the tender section. These will be regularly updated when new questions are submitted.

### Selection and contracting

- After selection, a contract will be set up with the successful expert. This contract will include details of payment arrangements.

### **Additional information**

All related materials developed in the framework of this contract will be considered as work per hire and, as such, copyright will be transferred to Interact, who will then be free to use, edit and publish them.

### **Annexes**

1. Interact III Programme Evaluation Plan
2. Interact III Cooperation Programme document
3. Interact III Target Groups (annex 5 to Cooperation Programme)
4. Data Processing Agreement (DPA) template