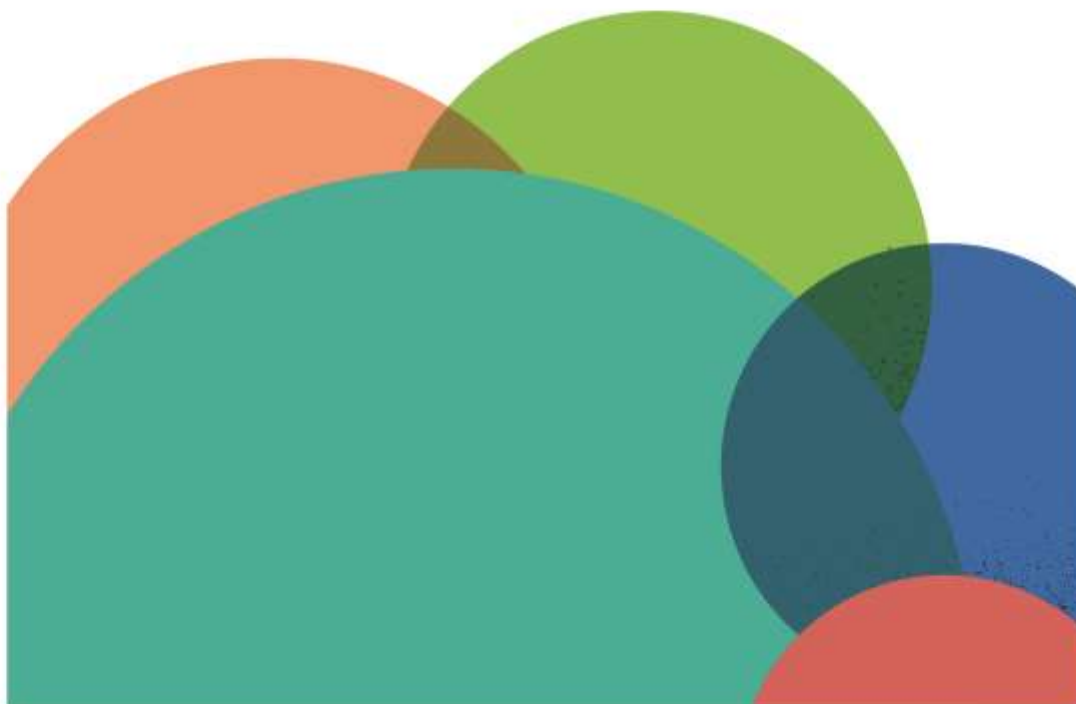


## Interreg IPA South Adriatic (Italy–Albania–Montenegro 2021-2027)



# PROGRAMME MANUAL

## 1.3 Evaluation Plan of the Interreg IPA South Adriatic

<b>Current version</b>	01.1
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## **Introduction**

This evaluation plan has been adopted in compliance with the provisions of the Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (below **Interreg Regulation**), articles 35 and 30.

The evaluation plan of the Interreg IPA South Adriatic Programme (below **Programme**) has been drafted by the Managing Authority assisted by the joint secretariat (below **MA/JS**) and submitted for approval to the Programme's Monitoring Committee (below **MC**), representing the three participating countries. Upon adoption, it will be published on the programme website. The outcomes of the evaluations will be published on the programme website.

The evaluation plan sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the Programme, taking into account lessons learnt from evaluations made in the previous programming period, the budgetary framework and the specificities of Programme area and of the Interreg IPA. The plan is meant to enable informed 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 the programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

Progress in the implementation of the evaluation plan as well as the outcomes of the evaluation activities are made available to the MC and to the European Commission.

The planned evaluations are set out in this paper, the description is indicative, as new evaluation needs might occur during programme lifetime. Therefore, the evaluation plan will be reviewed by the MC upon request and it might be adapted according to the programme needs.

## **1. EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES**

### **1.1. Objectives**

The Programme aims at contributing to a smarter, greener, more connected, more social and better governed South Adriatic area, embedding the results achieved in the previous programming period, while putting in place joint solutions and policies and preparing Albania and Montenegro to EU accession. To support the achievement of these objectives and its result orientation, the programme will carry out a number of evaluations. In compliance with articles 30 and 35 of the Interreg Regulation and 44 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (below **CPR**), these are aimed at improving the quality of the design and implementation of programme, thus its effectiveness, strengthening stakeholders' involvement, ensuring a successful communication and reinforcing the programme capacity to contribute to a change in the cooperation area in full respect of its natural environment. This evaluation plan sets out the framework to properly plan, implement and follow-up on these evaluations. It shall ensure that the evaluations provide appropriate input for programme management and policy decisions.

## 1.2. Type of evaluations

Based on the above mentioned objectives and in line with article 44 of the CPR and on the specific programme needs, two main types of evaluations are planned for the 2021-2027:

- A. Evaluations on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme (A. Efficiency type);
- B. Impact evaluations on each of the specific objectives selected by the Programme, including a focus on the themes of cooperation (B. Impact type)<sup>1</sup>.

More details on the evaluations and their timing are provided below. With the aim of ensuring their quality and optimizing the evaluation efforts and costs, synergy among different types of evaluations will be promoted as much as possible, in particular between those tackling efficiency, effectiveness and impacts.

## 2. COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### 2.1. Roles and responsibilities

The MC, representing the programme participating countries, has a decision-making role as for the development and implementation of the evaluation plan. It examines and approves the evaluation plan and any of its amendments. The MC reviews the plan as needed, in view of ensuring that emerging needs in terms of evaluation activities are reflected in the plan. The MC also examines the progress made in the implementation of the plan and the follow up on the findings of the evaluations.

In line with the “European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds” consultations and involvement of all programme partners, especially local and social partners, shall be ensured throughout the implementation of the evaluation plan, within the activities of the external evaluators, which include surveyes, interviews, interactive workshops and all activities necessary for an effective involvement of the programme partners, thus:

- involving the key programme stakeholders in the evaluation activities;
- looking for inputs in the implementation of the plan, e.g. on the evaluation questions;
- seeking for suggestions on data and/or data sources useful for the evaluations;
- reviewing the evaluations reports;
- proposing and monitoring of follow-up measures based on the evaluation findings.

Therefore, in compliance with the Rules of Procedure of the MC, whenever relevant evaluation actions are proposed or evaluation outcomes are discussed, programme partners are involved as observers, in application of the partnership principle.

In addition, as provided in the Rules of Procedure, the MC members may request to discuss the terms of reference for evaluation services, as well as they may propose specific working sessions to be organised to accompany and steer the work of external evaluators, as needed. These sessions may be used to steer the evaluation on specificities of the Programme and on aspects, which need a deeper analysis. They may be proposed either by the MC members or by the MA/JS, in agreement with the external evaluators.

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<sup>1</sup> Thematic evaluations are included in the evaluation of impacts within the Programme Specific Objectives, where a focus on the themes of cooperation may be included as needed

In addition to this evaluation function of the MC, one member of the MA/JS and a deputy member shall be identified to take a lead in the evaluation process and effectively assist the evaluation work at the MC. The MA/JS members shall perform their evaluation tasks without conflict of interest and impartiality, thus ensuring absence of bias.

Besides those working sessions of the MC upon request, the MA/JS shall present the evaluation progress and the reports, for their approval at the MC meetings or through written procedures, in compliance with the Rules of Procedure.

The MA, assisted by the JS, is responsible of managing the Technical Assistance funds for carrying out the evaluation activities, such as with contracting, coordination and quality control of the external experts; as well as coordination with EC, EUSAIR stakeholders, INTERACT, National/regional programmes (in this case supported by the MC members), Interreg programmes and others, etc.

## **2.2. Synergy with other programmes and initiatives**

The programme welcomes, promotes and requires the evaluation to investigate whenever possible, synergy with EUSAIR, and other INTERREG and National/Regional programmes as well as other institutions from the cooperation area have been exploited, in view of widening the evaluation perspective, enriching results of the evaluation activities.

In particular, within the planned case studies, the evaluators shall investigate on how far and how synergies are effectively exploited by specific project partners, who are known for participating and benefiting from supports from several different programmes and funding opportunities. This analysis shall provide illustrative good practice examples of effective exploitation of synergies among programmes and funds, to be promoted accordingly.

## **2.3. Source of evaluation expertise**

Article 44 of the CPR regulation states that evaluations are to be carried out by experts (internal or external) that are functionally independent from the authorities responsible for programme implementation. In addition, the MA foresees to identify a person and a deputy to accompany the evaluation process, which is going to be lead by external evaluators, contracted for this purpose, who implement the evaluation. The Programme intends to guarantee an efficient use of the human and financial resources allocated to evaluation activities as well as to ensure ownership of such activities from the Programme. Therefore, the following approach will be used.

Evaluations will be carried out by external experts, as it includes complex issues such as impact evaluations and complex methodologies or data collection to be applied and carried out.

Evaluations shall be commissioned to external experts in line with the applicable public procurement rules, within the available Technical Assistance funds. The MA/JS will provide them with information and input from the monitoring of the approved projects, extracted from the JEMS, as well as information on programme developments and ongoing discussions. Data collection will be completed by the experts, whenever necessary (e.g. through surveys, focus group meetings, interviews etc.).

The external evaluators, assisted by the MA/JS, will also carry out analysis aiming at measuring, assessing and analysing the progress in implementing the Programme, as well as capitalisations<sup>2</sup> planned, as useful tools for the MA/JS for improving its own performance from an early stage of the Programme on. For the evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency and the communication strategy, MA/JS provide the main data and reference analysis to the external experts, who will review them (see also below).

#### 2.4. Data collection and monitoring system

The Programme recognises the importance of setting up a well-functioning monitoring system, at an early stage. The main responsibility for data collection belongs to MA/JS. This shall guarantee homogeneity and consistency of the methodology used. In addition, the use of the Interact HITs templates, the common indicators listed in the Regulations and the use of JEMS allow for additional harmonisation and common approaches across different programmes.

The primary source of information for evaluations will be represented by the monitoring of the approved projects through their regular reporting (status / progress reports as well as final reports). Project's reports will be designed as far as possible to support the programme evaluations. Therefore, in addition to programme's indicators, the reports may include additional information (e.g. for environmental aspects, etc.). Additionally, they will have an "on demand" role and will collect qualitative information through e.g. surveys, workshops or case studies to complement data. To allow gathering richer information at Programme level and also better reaching local and regional stakeholders, this approach will be combined whenever possible with a bottom-up one, i.e. through the involvement of project partners in the collection of data, such as through thematic workshops or other tools suggested by the external evaluators. Projects will be requested to share information concerning the "quality" of their intervention, the target groups reached, etc, especially at project closure. They will be supported by the MA/JS and the evaluation experts in this "self- assessment exercise" through capacity building activities and tools to accompany evaluation at project level. The MA/JS, especially through the two identified persons, will play a role of operational coordination and supervising the correct flow of information. The evaluation experts will be in charge of the methodological and quality aspects. They will support the evaluation capacity building process, e.g. by organizing peer reviewing, specific workshops with project partners, elaborating guidance, aggregating the findings of the project evaluation, providing meta-evaluation and making in depth analyses when necessary.

Experts that will be contracted for evaluations will be asked to propose adequate methodologies for data collection and analysis such as case studies, desk research, interviews, workshops, etc.

#### 2.5. Dissemination of evaluation results

Information on the evaluation plan as well as the evaluation reports will be published on the Programme website. In addition, the Programme will actively promote the findings of evaluations through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. through information to beneficiaries, policy makers and

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<sup>2</sup> As specified in the Fact Sheet 1.1. of the Programme manual, capitalisation is an underlying principle and approach and guide all the relevant steps of the programme and project management. In particular, capitalisation activities have the objective to make sure that project results are widely used and benefited from, after the project end, i.e. all actions, activities, outputs, and products of the projects should aim at achieving long term results and impacts for the benefit of the territories and target groups thus, producing a concrete return of the investment of EU funds. In this sense, capitalisation is strictly connected to the evaluation exercise.

other stakeholders; the use of social media and community development, whenever relevant, etc.) as they are foreseen in the communication strategy, also in order to strengthen the evaluation capacity within the relevant stakeholders.

## **2.6. Quality management**

To ensure quality of programme evaluations, adequate time will be foreseen to plan and procure evaluations. For the latter, specific criteria will be defined in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts. They will relate in particular to competencies and expertise in evaluation, with specific regard to Interreg programmes. Evaluators will be required to use a sound methodology (EVALSED or similar) in the performance of their tasks. They will also be required to produce inception or interim and final reports on the evaluations carried out. The identified members of MA/JS will be responsible for quality control of the outsourced evaluation activities.

For those cases (effectiveness, efficiency, communication strategy) where the MA/JS provide main data and a reference analysis, the external evaluators will be in charge of reviewing and validating the evaluation concept (planned evaluation questions, methodology and data) and the results of the evaluations (to verify if conclusions are logic and objective).

The MC

1. May be involved in the definition of the ToR for the procurement of external experts and in the design of the evaluation concept for the evaluations carried out by the external experts, upon proposal of the MC members, coordinated by the appointed MA/JS staff;
2. shall review all evaluation reports;
3. shall accompany and monitor the implementation of follow-up measures defined as a result of evaluations.

The MC shall be regularly informed of progress on evaluation activities, their outcomes and will also receive evaluation reports.

## **2.7. Human and financial resources and training**

One identified staff member of the MA and one of the JS are engaged in the preparation and implementation of the plan, as one of their key tasks. Additional staff members of MA and JS will be involved in the evaluations as needed. The JS communication officer will contribute to the evaluation of the communication strategy and will also ensure the communication of the outcomes of programme evaluations. The pre-requisite for a use of the evaluation outcomes is a widespread information to all key stakeholders, such as the Monitoring Committee of the Programme, the potential applicants and beneficiaries in the projects, etc.

To ensure good knowledge of qualitative, quantitative evaluation methodologies and sound planning and managing of evaluations MA/JS staff will regularly take part in trainings offered, especially by Interact, the European Commission, the Italian Interreg community and exchange opportunity with other INTERREG programmes. A specific attention to the training of the staff will be paid by the Managing Authority, in order to ensure the most effective evaluation exercise.

Based on the estimated evaluation needs and the overall flat rate funds available from the technical assistance (TA), a maximum amount of EUR 200.000,00 is reserved for external expertise evaluations in the period 2021-2027, including capitalisation actions<sup>3</sup>. The internal analysis planned, as well as any related training of the MA/JS components, will be covered by the technical assistance (TA).

### 3. PLANNED EVALUATIONS AND TIMING

This section introduces the types of evaluation, to be performed during the Programme implementation. Evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency, results and impact, are to be carried out and the contribution of ESIF support to the achievement of the specific objectives of the Programme needs to be assessed.

Consequently, the main focus of evaluations during the Programme implementation is both on effectiveness and efficiency of the programme, and on its achieved results and impacts. In addition, the Programme contribution to the EUSAIR needs to be assessed too, by the same external evaluators.

Furthermore, the Programme is planning to include the assessment of the involvement of different types of partners (at least local and regional administration, universities and research organisations, and private no-profit organizations and social partners) in the Programme external evaluations. In line with the guidance from the European Commission, evaluation plans beyond a three-year period of the approval date of the plan (or its update) are indicative. Thus, it should be noted that whereas this section discusses possible methodological approaches and tools to be used for evaluations, the actual approach for each evaluation will be reviewed, and updated if needed, when developing terms of reference. External evaluators will be expected to propose a detailed evaluation design and methodology based on the Programme needs. Final evaluation questions for each evaluation will be discussed and possibly further refined together by the external evaluator, the MC and the MA/JS. Lastly, evaluation needs may change during the Programme implementation, and also therefore, the planned evaluations should be considered as indicative.

Impact in the context of the Programme impact evaluation is understood as the Programme's contribution to a change that is observed. Thus, the interventions related to specific objectives of the Programme will be evaluated in terms of how successful they are in reaching the intended results. Impact evaluation questions should be formulated so that by answering them, an evaluator can draw conclusions on the Programme's contribution to a change observed. If effectiveness is understood as "the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result" it can be concluded that effectiveness of the Programme and its' specific objectives are in fact covered by impact evaluation. Evaluating the impact of the specific objectives includes an assessment of whether and to what extent the Programme has been successful (effective) in reaching the desired results. Efficiency in the context of programme evaluation is defined as in "how the use of financial/administrative resources relates to outputs or results". The efficient use of financial resources allocated to each specific objective versus the achieved results will be included in impact evaluations. Based on impact evaluation outcomes, conclusions can be drawn on whether the funds allocated were sufficient and efficiently used for reaching real impacts. As for the use of the Programme's administrative resources, it does not seem feasible to evaluate it separately for each specific objective. Therefore, efficiency in terms of using administrative resources will be evaluated by assessing the proper

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote above on the link between capitalisation actions and evaluation.

functioning of the Programme bodies, and especially of the MA/JS that is responsible for the operational implementation and the administrative resources of the Programme. Findings from such evaluation performed by an independent evaluator will be looked at in comparison to the Programme reaching its results.

### 3.1. Evaluation methodology applied

All evaluations will be conducted through a theory-based evaluation in order to assess to what extent (why and how) an intervention has produced (intended or unintended) effects. Evaluators may make use of interviews, desk researches, benchmarking with other programmes as well as surveys and analysis of case studies. Depending on the specific type and topic of each evaluation, the relevant method and data requirements will be selected. Elements will be provided in the terms of reference for the selection of the evaluation experts whereas it will be up to the bidders to propose the most suitable evaluation method and data requirements.

### 3.2. Evaluation questions

The programme evaluation activities shall answer questions such as the following ones. The questions listed below are indicative. They will be combined with each other, reformulated or further specified in the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts or in the concept description for the evaluations carried out internally by MA/JS with the necessary external support.

#### Evaluation questions focused on the Impacts of each specific objective (B Impact type see 1.2.)

- What has changed in the cooperation area, in terms of quality of governance, integration of policies, contribution to sustainable economic development, etc.?
- How has the programme contributed to such change and how are the effects of the programme distributed in the partner territories (urban areas, cities, stable/ growing/ declining/ shrinking rural areas, tourism areas)?
- What other interventions would be needed in this field?
- How much has the projects contributed to the reduction of social and territorial inequalities and to the improvement of the economic and social well-being of the communities involved?
- How has the priority and/or specific objective contributed to wider policy objectives, in particular those of EUSAIR (in terms of contribution to the strategy and mutual benefit), the horizontal principles defined by the programme and European Commission (non- discrimination, sustainable development, etc.) or aspects such as the quality of life of citizens?
- Do small-scale projects contribute to achieve the programme objectives? What are their added value and impact?
- Do strategic projects effectively contribute to achieving EU, macro-regional, national and regional strategic objectives? Do they help the programme in reaching its objectives? How far are standard projects effective, compared to strategic projects?
- What are the lessons learnt in the procedures to be considered in the design of the 2027+ period?



#### Evaluation questions focused on the Outputs / results at project closure (B Impact type see 1.2.)

- Have projects achieved the target set during project selection? Have major deviations been duly justified through external factors? Which main obstacles and factors may be observed?
- Have programme indicators helped measuring the progress of outputs/results? What elements could not be captured through with those indicators? What other outputs and results have projects achieved at closure?
- which are per each priority axis, the concrete outputs/results to be capitalized on?
- which are the synergies implemented within the EUSAIR strategies, the other INTERREG and/or national/regional programmes?

#### Evaluation questions focused on the Efficiency and effectiveness of programme procedures (A Efficiency type see 1.2.)

- Are the phases from project generation to contracting as well as project monitoring efficient? What can be improved (identify bottle-necks and lessons learnt)?
- Is the monitoring system effective in measuring the targeted results and outputs?
- Are small-scale projects effective in reducing administrative burdens? Consequently, does the programme manage to involve more small organisations and new partners?
- Are the strategic project development and implementation procedures efficient? Do procedure enable strategic projects to efficiently achieve their objectives?
- What are the lessons learnt in the procedure put in place, which should be considered in the design of the 2027+ period?

#### Evaluation questions focused on the partnership and stakeholders' involvement (A Efficiency type see 1.2.)

- Has the specific objective reached its target or is it on a good way to do so?
- Has the programme succeeded in involving its stakeholders and in particular policy relevant partners and private non-profit partners?
- How far has the programme managed to attract new, relevant partners?
- What are the features of the partnerships (location within the Partner States, type of partner, etc.)?
- Which obstacles have been identified to the participation of stakeholders to the programme and which improvements in the programme management are deemed necessary based on the evaluation findings (e.g. reducing administrative burden, simplifying programme procedures)?

#### Evaluation questions focused on the Communication strategy (A Efficiency type see 1.2.)

- Have programme bodies been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the programme area?
- Have the programme communication measures reached the relevant target groups efficiently?
- Has the programme contributed to increase the capacity of projects to communicate their own achievements?
- Has the programme raised awareness about its activities and achievements?
- Does the communication strategy need to be updated for the remaining programme period based on the evaluation findings?

#### Evaluation questions focused on the compliance with the environmental principles (B Impact type see 1.2.)

- Are environmental aspects sufficiently taken into account in the phases of project assessment and selection? Do the approved projects comply with the findings of the strategic environmental assessment and with the typology and level of the impact identified?
- In connection to sound methodology, access to reliable data is a key requirement to any evaluation of quality.

### 3.3. 2021-2027 new approach on data sources

As the 2021-2027 period widely builds on the 2014-2020 implementation both for the policy objectives and for the operational management, the evaluations carried out in the 2014-2020 Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro programme are a solid basis, which the external evaluators have to duly take into account, while formulating questions, hypotheses and assumptions, as well as in the analyses of the available data. At the same time, the thematic analyses carried out within the capitalisation effort at the end of the 2014-2020 period, provide for specific inputs, useful to establish a baseline for the analyses by the external evaluators.

Furthermore, cross-programme evaluation and thematic studies carried out by the National Authorities in Italy, by Interact and the European Commission, may be a very important source of information for the external evaluators.

Finally, the 2014-2020 ex-post evaluation carried out by the European Commission shall also be taken into account by the external evaluators, while formulating specific hypotheses and assumptions.

Impact evaluations need to be based on data that allow evaluators to make conclusions on the Programme's impact on the institutional capacities of the Programme's target groups. Taking into account the Programme area and the aspect of cross-border cooperation, it is clear that such data or statistics are not being collected outside the Programme itself. In the context of the theory-based approach, two sources of data, or evidence, are relevant and available for evaluating the impact of the Programme.

On one hand, the Programme's online monitoring system JEMS collects information from projects via their regular project reporting. The project reporting forms, which are largely based on the HIT templates designed by a number of programmes under the lead of the Interact Programme and the EU Commission, are designed so that the data/evidence needs for evaluations are taken into account and consequently project reporting can directly be used to feed data into impact evaluations.

For the 2021-2027 period, in compliance with Article 33 of the Reg. (EU) 2021/1059, the MA does not submit Annual Implementation Reports any more, but it submits to the Commission a final performance report by 15 February 2031, who approves it with or without integrations. Before submission to the EC, the final performance report is drafted by the JS on the template established in accordance with Article 43(5) of Reg. (EU) 2021/1060, it is submitted to and approved by the MC, according to art. 30 of Reg. (EU) 2021/1059. Once approved by the EC, the MA publishes the final performance report on the programme website.

The final performance report is based on:

- a) the analysis of cumulative data collected throughout the entire programming period in the JEMS system, i.e. corresponding to data transmitted to the EU Commission by the Managing Authority in compliance with article Article 32 of the Interreg Regulation. This data covers both financial and physical progress elements, measured through the approved programme indicators.

b) the outcomes of the programme evaluation carried out in compliance with article 35 of the Interreg Regulation and the evaluation plan, which is developed according to the same article paragraph (5), approved by the MC in the first year after programme adoption.

In relation to the Data transfer and Evaluation, during the programming period the following steps will be followed:

1) the JS officers monitor the correct entering of project data related to the indicators of the single project by the project lead partner and partners, through the regular reportings on the JEMS system, as set out in the programme manual and the respective subsidy contracts;

2) the MA and the Accounting Function Office of the MA verifies the overall coherence of the required data and electronically transmits it, once extracted from the JEMS, through the SFC 2021 portal of the EU Commission, i.e. cumulative data on 31 January, 30 April, 31 July and 31 October of each year in accordance with the template set out in Annex VII to CPR Regulation, with the exception of the information required in point (b) of paragraph 2 and in paragraph 3 of this Article that shall be transmitted by 31 January and 31 July of each year;

3) the MA/JS appointed staff members provide the external evaluator with the data collected, as well as all information necessary to carry out the evaluations. In particular, at project closure, the final project report shall include specific information useful for the evaluation exercise, as well as the external evaluators foresees additional tools (e.g. surveys, interviews, workshops) to gather all information from project partners.

The monitoring system delivers quantitative and qualitative data on the Programme's output indicators as well as qualitative data on project outputs. On the other hand, considerable amount of data will also be collected outside the Programme. Qualitative and quantitative data in relation to the Programme's result indicators will be collected by external experts when updating the result indicator values for monitoring purposes. In addition, external impact evaluators will generate data and evidence on the Programme's impact, e.g., via surveys and interviews among the Programme target groups, end-users and other relevant stakeholders in the region.

The following table gives an overview of available data relevant for impact evaluations as well as **the data sources for the Programme evaluation**:

Data source and methods	Type of Data SOURCES
<b>Internal:</b> JEMS monitoring system (including reporting and final project report)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative data on output indicators</li> <li>• Qualitative information on output indicators</li> <li>• Quantitative data on result indicators</li> <li>• Qualitative information on result indicators</li> <li>• Qualitative information on project outputs (beyond indicators)</li> <li>• Further qualitative information on project results and achievements from project reports (beyond indicators)</li> <li>• Quantitative data on Programme target groups</li> <li>• Qualitative information on Programme target groups</li> <li>• Qualitative information on horizontal principles</li> </ul>

<b>External:</b> Monitoring of the Programme result indicator values (through interviews, focus groups, workshops, desk research).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative information on result indicator values</li> </ul>
<b>External:</b> Impact evaluators (through interviews, surveys, desk research and other relevant sources, such as national and international statistics when available)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative information on the Programme's contribution to the observed development of the Programme result indicator values</li> </ul>

### 3.4. Timing for evaluations

The timing for evaluations will be set according to the different programme implementation phases. Evaluations aiming at appraising programme efficiency and effectiveness will be carried out at an earlier stage than impact evaluations so that the findings of evaluations can still be taken on board and be used to improve or reorient where necessary the programme approach and practices.

Impact evaluations can only be carried out once results have been effectively achieved. Moreover, only at the end of the Programme will it be possible to get a comprehensive view of the Programme impacts and the final impact evaluation will be necessary for the final report due to the European Commission. Yet, impact evaluation should take place early enough to provide feedback on Programme implementation based on which the Programme bodies can steer the Programme.

Consequently, it seems suitable, immediately upon approval of this evaluation plan (26 September 2023), to start the drafting and the launch of the call for tenders for external evaluators, in order to have the selection / contracting of external evaluators in 2024.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the programme shall be assessed already in 2025, together with the assessment of the effectiveness of the small-scale projects, having an advanced implementation at the end of 2025. In 2026, the first draft report on the analyses of outputs / results of closed projects of the first call, alongside with a case studies report on the closed projects will be possible.

In 2026-2027, the first draft report on the analyses of outputs / results of strategic projects, alongside with a case studies report on them will be possible. It is also expected that the 2027+ programming exercise will be started, therefore it is necessary to plan specific inputs for the subsequent programming period, in form of lessons learnt both from the operational management and for the policy objective and thematic achievements. This shall also include an assessment of the effectiveness of strategic projects.

In 2027, all these reports may be adopted and as long as additional projects will provide relevant data, enabling an update of these reports.

Towards the closure of the programme implementation in 2028-2029, the global contribution of the Programme to the EUSAIR shall be evaluated, as well as programme global impacts in the different themes of cooperation. In 2030, all reports shall be adopted in their final versions, together with the inputs on Final Report to the European Commission.

In view of obtaining comparable data, surveys will be addressed as much as possible to the same respondents (persons or administrations/departments) of the questionnaire used for the baseline. To ensure efficiency, impact evaluations of the SOs will include the monitoring of result indicators.

**Table Programme reporting and programme Evaluation time schedules**

Year of report submission	Programme implementation phases	Evaluations and milestones planned	Data and information SOURCES and follow-up on evaluations
<b>2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>First call</b> for small-scale projects: closed with contracting (Autumn)</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: approved and contracted (Autumn)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approval of the <b>evaluation plan</b> (26 September 2023)</li> </ul>	
<b>2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Second call</b> for standard projects: Launch, closure and contracting (End of 2024)</li> <li>- <b>First call</b>: Regular reporting of the small-scale projects and first outputs</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: Regular reporting</li> <li>- <b>First transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch of the <b>call for tenders</b> for external evaluators (Summer)</li> <li>- Selection / contracting of <b>external evaluators</b></li> </ul>	
<b>2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>First call</b> projects: Closed (Final reports)</li> <li>- <b>Second call</b> for standard projects: Regular reporting and first outputs</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: Regular reporting and first outputs</li> <li>- <b>Regular transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development and adoption of <b>programme effectiveness report</b> Including a focus on <b>small-scale projects</b> effectiveness (A Efficiency type)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> </ul>
<b>2026</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Second call</b> for standard projects: Regular reporting and outputs</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: Regular reporting</li> <li>- <b>Third call</b> for small-scale projects: Launch / contracting</li> <li>- <b>Regular transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluation report on the <b>analyses of outputs / results of closed projects</b> (B Impact type)</li> <li>- <b>Case studies report on the outputs/ results of closed projects</b> (B Impact type)</li> <li>- Report on <b>lessons learnt for 2027+</b> period, including a focus on the <b>themes of cooperation</b> (B Impact type)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> <li>- Adoption by the MC of the effectiveness evaluation report</li> <li>- Publication and communication of key findings of the effectiveness report</li> <li>- Follow-up on the findings by JS/MA</li> </ul>
<b>2027</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Second call</b> for standard projects: Closure of first projects and outputs (Final reports)</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: Regular reporting</li> <li>- <b>Third call</b> for small-scale projects implementation and closure (final reports)</li> <li>- <b>Regular transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption by MC of the 3 evaluation reports drafted in 2026</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> <li>- Publication and communication of key findings of the reports</li> <li>- Follow-up on the findings by JS/MA</li> </ul>
<b>2028</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Second call</b> for standard projects: Closure of last projects and outputs (Final reports)</li> <li>- <b>Strategic projects</b>: Regular reporting</li> <li>- <b>Regular transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Updated versions</b> of the adopted evaluation reports</li> <li>- Development of the report on <b>EUSAIR</b> contribution (B Impact type)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> <li>- Publication and communication of key findings of the reports</li> <li>- Follow-up on the</li> </ul>

			findings by JS/MA
<b>2029</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Strategic projects:</b> Regular reporting and closure (Final reports)</li> <li>- <b>Regular transmission</b> of relevant data to European Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption by MC of the update and of the report on the <b>EUSAIR</b> contribution</li> <li>- Development of the <b>Impact evaluation</b> report, including a focus on the <b>themes of cooperation</b> and a focus on the effectiveness of <b>Strategic</b> Projects (B Impact type)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> <li>- Publication and communication of key findings of the reports</li> <li>- Follow-up on the findings by JS/MA</li> </ul>
<b>2030</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Closure activities, reporting, audits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption by MC of the <b>impact evaluation report</b> (B Impact type)</li> <li>- Based on the impact evaluation report, <b>inputs on Final Report</b> to the European Commission by external evaluators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For <b>theory-based evaluation</b>, tools (surveys, interviews, etc.) developed and applied by the External Evaluators, while including also social partners</li> <li>- Publication and communication of key findings of the reports</li> <li>- Follow-up on the findings by JS/MA of 2027+ period</li> </ul>
<b>2031</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 February : Submission of the Final Report</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finalisation and submission of Final Report to EC</li> </ul>