Fact Sheet: Project Selection Process

Period 2021-27: Version 2, November 2022

This is the revised fact sheet on the complaints procedure, updating previous guidance in the 2014.2020 period to reflect the position in 2021-2027. We recommend to read also the briefing note on project selection[1] since it provides tips on issues of particular importance for the Commission.

What is project selection about?

The aim of the selection process is to select those projects that contribute best to the achievement of programme objectives. It starts with the received project applications and ends with the selection of the projects. There are three phases in the selection process: (1) call for proposals with received project proposals; (2) assessment process divided in three steps - (a) administrative check, (b) eligibility check, and (c) quality assessment; (3) selection procedure followed by a vote from the Monitoring/Steering Committee. The next step in the project life cycle is the contracting of selected projects.

Why we are discussing it?

The selection process is a crucial part of the programme life cycle, because good and well performing projects are the decisive element for sound programme results. The programme needs to determine to what extent each project will contribute to the achievement of programme objectives and if the partnership is able to implement the project with the given resources.

Due to the nature of Interreg programmes, several agreements regarding the selection process need to be negotiated already at the programming stage and before the first call for proposals opens.

Reference to the regulations & major novelties

The limited funding for Interreg underpins the need for a quality approach along all steps of the project cycle. Selection criteria should support the selection of operations having a lasting impact. Also, a recent Special Report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on project selection in cross-border cooperation programmes[2] emphasises the need for sound, fair and transparent selection systems at programme level.

Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Art. 22) describes the selection of operations in Interreg programmes. According to this article (22.1) operations under cooperation programmes shall be selected by a **monitoring committee (MC),** which in turn may set up a **steering committee (SC)** that acts under its responsibility for the selection of operations. There is one exception to the general rule of decision-making by the MC:

When all or part of an operation is implemented outside the programme area inside or outside the Union, the selection of that operation shall require the explicit approval by the managing authority in the monitoring committee or, where applicable, the steering committee (cf. article 22 (1) Interreg).

Article 73 in the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) on the selection of operations by the managing authority (MA) **does not apply** to Interreg.[3]

For the selection of operations, the MC or, where applicable, the SC shall establish and apply non-discriminatory and transparent criteria and procedures. Prior to selection the MC has to verify compliance with several well-known principles such as contribution to programme objectives and value for money or the so-called horizontal principles[4], non-infringement of operations with the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU, i.e. the fundamental EU-law). Interesting novelties among these principles are:

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[1]   See the Note under: https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=&field_fields_of_expertise_tid=21&field_networks_tid=All#4004-briefing-note-project-selection-interreg-2021-27

[2]   See the report under: https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR21_14/SR_cross-border_EN.pdf

[3]   See article 1(5) on the exemptions for Interreg programmes in the CPR.

[4]   Cf. provisions in article 22.2: *[…] ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities, gender equality and take account of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment […]*

d) MC should verify that the beneficiary has the necessary financial resources and mechanisms to cover <u>operation and maintenance costs</u> for operations comprising investment in infrastructure or productive investment, so as to ensure their financial sustainability;

j) *MC should ensure that, for investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years, an assessment of expected impacts of climate change (i.e. an assessment on the climate resilience of the planned infrastructure) is carried out.*

In accordance with Article 75 of the CPR, the MA has to support the MC during the selection process. The MA has to provide the MC in a timely manner with all information necessary to carry out its tasks and ensure the follow-up of the decisions and recommendations of the MC.

It is important to note that there are two cases with a quite different approach to selection.[5]

- Policy Objective 5 (PO 5): If a programme opted for PO 5 the selection of operations should involve local and regional actors. One of the key purposes of strategy-based territorial development in the framework of PO 5 is the empowerment of regional and local actors.[6]

- Small Project Fund (SPF): In accordance with article 25 of the Interreg Regulation the SPF beneficiary has to set up the system for assessment and selection – usually in close cooperation with the MA.[7] If the SPF beneficiary is a cross-border entity such as a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) or a so-called cross-border legal body the cooperation element is considered to be internalised by the beneficiary.[8] In this case the beneficiary can select without any further legal requirements for the selection committee. If the SPF beneficiary represents the third option - i.e. a body having legal personality - it requires *a body involving representatives from at least two participating countries, of which at least one is a Member State to select the joint small projects* [article 25 (2)].

Legislative framework:

Interreg (ETC) Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 articles 22 (selection), 25 (SPF) and
CPR Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 article 75

Challenges and frequently asked questions

When establishing the project selection procedure all programmes need to agree on the following:
- How to organise calls for proposals effectively?
- How to organise a simple, quick and effective assessment procedure?
- What are options to work with quality assessment criteria?
- Who should be assessing projects?
- What are operational options for voting and decision-making?
- How to organise an effective complains procedure?

Answers to these questions and recommendations can be found in the next chapter.

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[5] Interact is supporting programmes having opted for PO5 and SPF. For both we foster exchange among programmes and provide regular webinars with the support of COM colleagues. For the SPF there is a community (if you are not yet registered please send a request to: small.projects@interact-eu.net)

[6] In accordance with article 3 (1) (e) of the ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 support under PO5 shall be provided through territorial and local development strategies, through specific delivery mechanisms in accordance with article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. One of the possible mechanisms is Community Led Local Development but Interreg programmes may develop their own delivery mechanisms as long as they meet following pre-requirements: the approach has to be strategy-based and selection has to involve local and regional actors.

[7] If the SPF beneficiary is a cross-border entity such as a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) or a s-called 'cross-border legal body´, i.e. the cooperation element is internalised by the beneficiary in principle the beneficiary selects, i.e. there are no specific requirements for the selection committee. If the SPF beneficiary represents the third option, i.e. a body having legal personality, a body involving representatives from at least two participating countries, of which at least one is a Member State, shall select the joint small projects [article 25 (2)].

[8] Cooperation element internalised: e.g. in case of an EGTC we would assume that the assembly of the EGTC agrees on a mandate for a smaller sub-committee to strategically direct and supervise the SPF and select the projects. A similar logic would be assumed in case of Cross-border legal body: the participating institutions agree internally on an arrangement which allows for fair and efficient project selection.

I. Calls for proposals and application procedure

Types of calls of proposals based on focus

<u>Targeted calls</u> - Targeted calls can also be used during the whole lifespan of the programme. Programmes choose this type of calls for a variety of reasons. Some of them are for example:

- limited or earmarked budget, as targeting helps limit the number of applications (thus saving resources),
- limited to a priority axis or a Specific Objective (SO),
- attracting certain types of organisations or projects or topics (e.g. capitalisation projects towards the end of the programme).[9]

The decision to launch targeted calls should result from a fair and open debate in the MC or SC. Specificities and the inherent targeted approach should be clear.

Targeted calls can be used during the whole lifespan of the programme.

Open calls - Open calls are calls for proposals where projects can apply for all programme priorities where funds are still available. They can be used during the whole lifespan of the programme, with or without set deadlines *(see below Types of calls based on duration of submission phase).*

Calls for strategic projects – In principle strategic projects do not require calls but programmes may decide to do such calls. In 2021-27 programmes had to submit an annex on so-called strategic projects defined during the programming phase.[10] Strategic projects are often substantial infrastructure projects and the range of possible implementers is limited. Another type of strategic projects can respond to emerging challenges. Such needs may arise at later stage of programme implementation owing to challenges or socio-economic developments not known during the programming phase.[11] Strategic projects focus on a specific needs identified in a thorough programme analysis or mid-term review. Calls for strategic projects tend to include a set of quite detailed and rather technical criteria. Matching projects are designed explicitly for this purpose (e.g., building a bridge between x and y cities over the river z).

Small project fund (SPF) – the SPF is one of the two options to meet the requirements according to article 24 of the Interreg Regulation.[12] Scope and details of the SPF are set out in article 25 of the Regulation. The (sole) SPF-beneficiary manages the SPF as an operation and is accountable for its implementation including setting up the Calls for proposals. Depending on the agreements among programme partners various kinds of organisations can apply for small projects. The SPF beneficiary is in charge of selecting and approving the final recipients. In practice, SPFs are very popular under the Interreg-specific Objective 1 (ISO 1) on better governance and Specific Objective 4.6 on tourism and culture.

Types of calls of proposals based on duration of the submission phase

Ongoing calls - Ongoing calls are calls which don't have any deadline for submission. Projects can submit their proposal any time. Programmes decide either in advance when the projects will be assessed (e.g., once a year), or they wait until a sufficient number of projects is available for assessment before they start the assessment procedure.

Calls with deadline – most programmes set a deadline for submission. If needed, programmes have the possibility of adjusting the selection criteria for each call.[13] Calls with a deadline allow to establish a certain

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[9] Such as specific calls for projects responding to the pandemic (COVID) in the year 2020 in several programmes [e.g. Euregio Maas Rhine (EMR) or Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA)] or a targeted call on the capitalisation of research results organised by Central Europe in cooperation with Horizon 2020.

[10] Although the annex could be submitted empty in case the programme decided not to have such projects or to introduce them at a later stage.

[11] Such as the migration crisis in Europe in 2015 fuelled by the war in Syria which – obviously - could not have been considered during programming for the 2014-20 period (programming for the period started in most programmes in 2012 and was closed in 2014).

[12] Cross-border programmes (Strand A) have to implement either SPF (for small projects) or so-called small-scale projects (volume not defined) in the Regulation hence to be defined at programme level.

[13] Changed or additional criteria might be a consequence when having a specific focus in the call. However, we would recommend to have a standard set of criteria which remains unchanged throughout all calls and to include the option to add specific thematic criteria if required.

periodicity in the programme life-cycle with calls, assessment phase and date of selection in the MC/SC. However, the drawback is that the call cycle does not necessarily coincide with the project maturity cycle, and projects which are ready for submission might need to wait for the next call to open.

Application procedure

In most programmes a one-step application procedure is used. This means that all project proposals are submitted as a whole and undergo a full assessment in one step, provided they are compliant with the programme rules (checked in the so-called administrative and eligibility checks).

Option: Two-step procedure

However, an increasing number of programmes are considering a two-step application procedure. It has many advantages and is recommended by EC. Advantages are obvious in case of programmes where a substantial number of applications are expected. Hence these programmes make an effort and introduce the two-steps procedure to avoid bottlenecks and frustration for:

- applicants (since high numbers of applications and/or limited budgets increases the likelihood of high numbers of rejected proposals) and
- programme management (since it is far more efficient and effective to assess shorter descriptions rather than eventually irrelevant or immature proposals which still means to invest time, energy and money).

The procedure opens also room to coach the development of the project idea to its full proposal if capacity of Joint Secretariat allows for it or programme rules include the option for such support.[14] In case of large strategic projects, the possibility of a seed money facility for the pre-selected projects might be considered as a part of two-step procedures.

In the first step, the applicants must submit a simplified project proposal, often called an Expression of Interest (EoI) or Concept Note (CN). The programmes usually ask for a description of project objectives, foreseen results and outputs, a general description of the work plan, an estimated overall budget and the structure of the partnership.

The pre-selected projects are then invited to apply in the second step, submitting the full application. Usually, the cornerstones of the project idea as submitted in the **Expression of Interest** can be changed only to a certain extent (e.g., the budget can increase up to 20 %, or only two out of 4 partners can be changed) and is binding in some parts (e.g., project objectives, proposed results). Rules on the pre-assessment of projects based on a **Concept Note**, which is offered to projects by some programmes, is only optional and the decision is not binding, therefore, the project can still be submitted.

Project assessment is much shorter in the first step as only some parts of the quality assessment are done, due to the short project description. Formal requirements are usually not checked, to avoid a disproportionate burden for the applicant. The assessment in the first step focuses more on the contents, and thereof mostly on the relevance of the project, its objectives and results. The second step usually consists of a complete formal, eligibility and quality assessment. It should be noted that project proposals having passed the first step may not be successful at the second step. In both steps, the final decision is taken by the MC/SC.

II. Assessment process

Assessing projects is an important step in the selection process as it assures transparency and accountability in spending EU funds. By establishing and publishing assessment criteria, the quality standards against which projects are assessed are set. They are an important element securing the quality of programme implementation and guiding applicants in project development.

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[14]   In case of high numbers of interested applicants this might be a challenge in terms of capacity or programme management might refrain from it because of potential conflict of interest at later stages in the project management cycle.

Assessment steps and criteria

The assessment process begins as soon as the call for proposals closes (if the call is not on-going), when all project applications have been submitted. First, the programme checks the admissibility and eligibility of projects[15], and only then will the quality assessment start when core assessment criteria are applied.

In some programmes, **admissibility and eligibility** of projects are checked at the same time. The check is based on questions which can be answered with "yes," "no" or "not relevant for a particular project". A "no" answer may lead to (1) outright rejection of the application, or (2) a request for further information or clarification. Illustrative guidance materials[16] are essential to lower the likelihood of failure at these two stages. Another obvious option for seeking advice is the direct contact with JS staff – in our experience perceptions on this option differ among programmes. For some it is an essential element to allow for a smooth entry to a comparatively difficult type of programme for others it should be restricted to technical and formal guidance to avoid conflicts of interest at later stages in the project management cycle.

The final step, **quality assessment**, implies an in-depth assessment of the project. Various conclusions regarding the quality of the project can already be drawn based on the first reading for the eligibility check (e.g., partnership spread, intensity of cooperation, relevance of the selected theme and outputs).

Nevertheless, the quality of the project is assessed from different perspectives at this stage. In general, quality is subjective – it is a matter of perception and individual judgement. Hence, it is necessary to ensure that project quality requirements are collectively understood and supported by all relevant actors, i.e. MA/JS, eventual external assessors and MC members.

INTERACT, together with Interreg programmes, has developed **harmonised assessment templates** (as part of the HIT[17] documents including a basic set of assessment questions and guiding principles for the three assessment steps. Together with the harmonised application form the assessment questions address the need to fund projects that contribute to the intended changes and effects to the greatest extent possible.

Assessment methodology

Assessors

Every project should be assessed by at least two assessors. Assessors can come from internal programme management staff, i.e. from JS or MA or they can be external assessors, i.e. consultants with specific sectoral knowledge, university professors, ministry staff, regional bodies, steering committee members, etc. If possible, especially in the case of cross-border cooperation, each side of the border should be represented in the group of assessors.

If the programme lacks resources and/or expertise for internal assessment of projects, it can involve external assessors. It is recommended that one of the two assessors should be external and the other a member of the Joint Secretariat, as this usually results in a sound assessment of thematic aspects (coming from external thematic experts) and cooperation/programme aspects (coming from JS assessors). An external expert could also be used as an additional assessor in cases where specific knowledge is needed (e.g. specific thematic expertise on environmental issues or construction expertise). Where a third assessor is needed because of significant differences in the first set of scores, an internal assessor should act as facilitator or arbitrator - as they have a better understanding of MC perspectives and what is required to achieve programme objectives.

The following table lists advantages and disadvantages of selecting internal and external assessors.

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[15] In Interreg the eligibility of a project depends to a large extent on the eligibility of the partnership and the compliance with requirements related to the cooperation dimensions.

[16] What we clearly recommend is to issue a FAQ during calls which summarises the most popular questions and answers and is regularly updated.

[17] HIT stands for Harmonised Implementation Templates; templates in the selection package for 2021-27 are available: https://www.interact-eu.net/library#3812-hit-2021-2027-selection-package

Table: Advantages and disadvantages of internal and external assessors

	Internal assessors	External assessors
ADVANTAGES	• Involved in identifying programme priorities/objectives. • Know the programme well. • Have a better understanding of the specificity of cooperation programmes. • Are experienced and know what works or does not work. • Are aware of what is feasible and realistic (projects, results). • Can detect subtle warning signs in project designs. • Are committed.	• Have the necessary professional background. • Possess specialised knowledge. • Often provide a new perspective on the subject • Are independent from both the applicants and the MC/SC/MA/JS. • Remain anonymous to the applicants.
DISADVANTAGES	• Are not impartial. • Lack sectoral experience. • Might lack general experience owing to potentially high staff turnover. • Might lack capacity (if too many applications are received).	• Often lack in-depth knowledge about the programme and Interreg. • Are not liable for the consequences of their recommendations. • Tend to focus on their field, leaving some aspects of the quality assessment aside. • Require training by the JS to safeguard comparable standards across projects • Are possibly not as committed to assessment as the Joint Secretariat. • Often incur substantial cost

When using external assessors, the programme might consider:

- inviting them to programme meetings about specific programme themes where sub-themes, interpretations and priorities related to the theme are discussed together with project officers;
- arranging regular briefings between external assessors and programme staff;
- using the same external experts (more than one per theme and from different countries participating in the programme), especially if they have been "tested" and found to be reliable;
- identifying cases where external expertise is necessary (if not using them on regular basis);
- inviting them to MC/SC meetings.

All assessors selected, especially when they are external to the programme, should sign a self-declaration of confidentiality and impartiality. This is usually available as a template.

Assessment approach

There are two basic approaches when assessing projects: descriptive and numerical. Obviously, the two approaches can be combined. The ranking of projects based on scores is strongly recommended because it makes the procedure more transparent.[18] If a programme decides to use a ranking of project proposals as the basis for decision-making the numerical assessment is indispensable as the descriptive part does not lend itself to aggregation. Additional indications of the project's strengths and weaknesses can be provided as comments or justifications in text fields next to the scores (i.e. blending numerical and qualitative approaches). The table below shows examples of the scale used in the numerical assessment approach.

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[18]   This is also a clear recommendation in the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors No 18 from 2021. As sample for the Report 23 internal cross-border (CBC) programmes have been investigated. recommendation 2 of the Report states: Prioritise and award support to projects based on merit using scores (cf. ECA SR Report, 18, 2021, p. 43)

Table: Examples of numerical assessment scales

Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3
1 – poor / very poor	-2 – very poor	0 – insufficient
2 – fair / poor	-1 – poor	1 – sufficient
3 – good / adequate	0 - fair	3 – appropriate
4 – very good / good	+1 – good	5 – completely appropriate
5 – excellent	+2 – excellent	

Practitioners and the Commission recommend using the third example in the above table as the wider intervals in the scale lead to quite clear-cut results and distinction between good and weak projects.

To put more emphasis on the assessment criteria which programmes considers most relevant, weighting of scores and setting of thresholds is frequently used (see example below).

Table: Example of weighting and thresholds

Criterion	Max score	Weighting	Weighted Final Score
1. STRATEGIC CRITERIA			
1.1 Project's context (relevance and strategy)	10	X3	30
1.2 Cooperation character	10	X3	40
1.3 Project's contribution to programme's objectives, expected results and outputs	10	X4	40
1.4 Partnership relevance	10	X1	10
2. OPERATIONAL CRITERIA			
2.1 Management	10	X3	30
2.2 Communication	10	X1	10
2.3 Work plan	10	X2	20
2.4 Budget	10	X2	20
TOTAL			**200**
QUALITY THRESHOLD (65 %)			**130**

When applying **weighting scores,** each assessment question is multiplied by the pre-agreed number (which depends on the importance of the assessment question), and the final score is taken into account.

The aim of the **threshold** is to approve only those projects that lie above a certain level, despite the fact that there are funds available for all projects. To avoid providing funds to projects of lower quality, the programme should set minimum thresholds already when opening the call for proposals (e.g. 60 / 65 %).

In 2014-2020 some programmes used the threshold for the level of assessment questions as well; e.g., a minimum 50 % score in the assessment question "Cooperation character". For 2021-2027, the Commission considers the 'cooperation character' as an essential criterion to be checked as part of the eligibility check. In addition, the Commission also recommends assessing the intensity of cooperation as part of the quality assessment.

Assessment tools

The programme has to prepare the templates to enable efficient assessment in advance. It comprises checklists for admissibility and eligibility checks as well as quality assessment grids, assessment reports, and standard letters to be sent to applicants to be used throughout the entire process. In most programmes, these templates and work routines will be – more or less - integrated in the electronic monitoring systems. Templates and procedures should be prepared in a way which allows also external assessors to work with them and submit 'signed' assessment results. It is important that templates allow for some flexibility to accommodate case-specific issues (in practical terms it means to provide text fields next to scores allowing to highlight important issues that may fall outside the usual scope of quality assessment).

Guidance for assessors – programmes prepare an assessment manual, ideally covering the following aspects:

- it is an agreement between programme partners regarding how certain topics should be understood and assessed;
- it gives guidance to assessors, whether external or internal, experienced or less experienced, but above all, it explains in a coherent way what the programme values;
- it usually comprises the basic rules and main principles of the assessment, a description of the selection process of the assessors, the assessment procedure and timelines, rules governing correspondence and the handling of documents, different templates in annexes (assessment sheet, declaration of impartiality and confidentiality, request for missing documents and clarifications, rejection/approval letter, etc.);
- if the programme uses external assessors, the guidance is more detailed and also includes basic information about the programme;
- programmes could offer additional guidance for assessors by explaining in which cases projects should get a certain score; e.g., the project gets the highest score because it demonstrates strong cooperation as it complies with all four cooperation criteria.

Assessment sheets

- These are first completed by each assessor individually, then a joint assessment sheet is prepared, usually based on a discussion within the JS or a group of assessors.
- It is helpful for assessors if the sheet indicates where the information needed for assessing a certain topic can be found on the application form, especially when the consistency of the project is checked.
- If developed in on-line or Excel format, interconnected entry fields are possible – there is no need to retype or calculate the scores separately and manually.

III. Selection procedure and follow up

Selection procedure

The selection process has to be fair and transparent. It is most likely the major governance challenge for the MA.[19] In technical terms the selection process is the key element of the Rules of Procedures (RoPs) for the MC or SC in written.[20] The RoPs are subject to approval of the Committee and set out in detail the procedures and options for decisions.

The selection procedure starts after the MC or SC[21] members receive information on all eligible applications received and assessed. Usually, the JS provides information on scoring and ranking on projects, with recommendations on which projects are good enough to be approved.

Approval decisions are taken at the MC/SC meeting – various options exist depending on numbers of eligible applications and routines established over the years, e.g.:

- decision-making 'en bloc' along the list of scores and the budget available with a certain room for manoeuvre as regards projects close to the line or
- discussion and decision-making on each project submitted or

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[19]   On principles and legal requirements please see also the Briefing note on selection – a document which has been developed in close cooperation with colleagues from DG Regio, units D1 and D2 (see under: https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=&field_fields_of_expertise_tid=21&field_networks_tid=All#4004-briefing-note-project-selection-interreg-2021-27)

[20]   RoPs are required according to article 28 of the Interreg Regulation. Next to the selection process the RoPs should set out in detail how the MC is composed (in acc. with article 29 of the Regulation) and how it fulfils all its tasks in accordance with article 30. RoPs have to take also critical aspects into consideration such as avoidance of conflicts of interests and partiality or dealing with complaints of applicants against selection decisions.

[21]   Article 22 of the Interreg Regulation allows for the introduction of a steering committee (SC) for project selection:

  1.   […] That monitoring committee may set up one or, in particular in the case of sub-programmes, more steering committees which act under its responsibility for the selection of operations. […]
  2.   For the selection of operations, the monitoring committee or, where applicable, the steering committee shall establish and apply criteria and procedures which are non-discriminatory and transparent

- blended approaches discussing critical projects separately whereas undisputed projects are decided en bloc.

The ranked list with assessment results is the reference point for discussion and decision-making in the MC. To be fair and transparent, deviations from the list decided by the MC require proper justification. Sometimes the Committee members may have a greater understanding of the nature of some projects or the impact of the national policy context. Thus, the Committee members should have certain flexibility to follow their shared judgement for project approval.

Programmes may introduce options for the Committee to intervene in the Rules of Procedures (RoPs)[22] The strategic character of their judgment can be taken into account (an external assessor might be a specialist in a given domain, but not necessarily has the full understanding of the programme needs).

Voting options

The approach to voting is also a decisive feature of the selection process. Basic options are either consensus or majority voting. A frequent practice in cross-border programmes is delegation voting, i.e. each of the national delegations has one vote. And there may be combinations of the voting principles such as majority voting within national delegations and final decision taken in consensus.

Usually voting and decision-making tends to be more expert-driven in transnational programmes owing to the fact that several Member States are involved. In cross-border programmes debates on divergent perspectives between Member States or different government levels (national, regional, local) happen quite often.

Types of selection decisions

After the assessment process projects are either approved or rejected, but they could also be approved with conditions or rejected with a recommendation to re-apply.

Conditions need to be clear, met within a deadline, and cannot fundamentally change the project. The procedures have to be in the RoPs for the MC/SC and have to set out all responsibilities (JS, MA, MC/SC).

Conditions should be confined to clear-cut technical features that can be easily and quickly fixed by project applicants since one needs to strike a balance between the efforts invested in such procedures and the alternative of inviting the project applicant to come back for the next call. It is important that the number and types of conditions are reasonable, so as not to delay the programme implementation by waiting for projects to fulfil the conditions.

There are times in the programme's life cycle when conditional approvals are well justified; e.g., when waiting for the next round would jeopardise the project idea (since it heads for a specific timeline or requires a long implementation period) or money in a given priority is more or less spent or the programme is running its last calls.

Option for complaints

All programmes need to have in place (and inform the applicants about) an effective arrangement for the examination of complaints. Article 69.7 of CPR on the responsibility of Member States stipulates that: *Member States shall make arrangements to ensure the effective examination of complaints concerning the Funds. The scope, rules and procedures concerning those arrangements shall be the responsibility of Member States in accordance with their institutional and legal framework.* (CPR article 69.7).[23] Programmes should develop such procedures and obviously the need for fair and equal treatment of all applicants and beneficiaries means that options regardless of the seat of the applicant have to be the same.

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[22]   E.g. the Committee might have the right to give a top-up in the range of maximum 10 to 15 % as additional points.
[23]   For more information on the complaints procedure please see also the Fact Sheet on the complaints procedure (https://www.interact-eu.net/library#4124-fact-sheet-complaints-procedure-art-697-cpr).

Communication of results

Following standard transparency requirements, the selection decisions need to be communicated to all projects assessed and to the general public. The projects are notified by the JS about the selection decisions made at the MC/SC meeting in the following way:

- Lead Partners of the **approved projects** will receive a letter stating the decision of the MC/SC, as well as the total ERDF fund approved;
- Similarly **projects approved with conditions** will receive explanations of conditions and deadlines for their fulfilment.
- Applicants of the **rejected applications** will receive a notification letter together with a summary of the assessment results, listing the reasons why their application has failed.

In addition to the above, programmes need to ensure access to assessment documents, if requested by projects. Key obligations of the MA according to Article 49 of the CPR comprise communicating the schedule of calls and results of selection:

- maintain an updated time schedule of calls on the programme website (in acc. with Article 36 of the Interreg Regulation) including all indicative elements listed under Article 49(2) CPR;
- publish a list of beneficiaries and projects which is regularly updated including a quite comprehensive set of data as listed in Article 49(3) CPR.

Reference to other papers

Briefing note on selection (August 2022) (see under: https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=&field_fields_of_expertise_tid=21&field_networks_tid=All#4004-briefing-note-project-selection-interreg-2021-27)

HIT selection package (see under: https://www.interact-eu.net/library#3812-hit-2021-2027-selection-package

Fact sheet on complaints procedure (https://www.interact-eu.net/library#4124-fact-sheet-complaints-procedure-art-697-cpr)