

# Flexibility, adaptability of programmes

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

## Overview

Adaptability and agility are crucial for success, enabling relevant solutions and effective responses to changing circumstances. Interreg programmes have shown great adaptability during crises like COVID-19. At the same time Interreg is known as lacking flexibility due to defined financing and legislative constraints.

For example, the agile methodologies are prevalent in project management for decades, especially in the innovation and IT fields. But they are used little in Interreg, if not entirely absent. Also the question can be raised whether the identified challenges and agreed-upon approaches can remain relevant, efficient, and effective for the whole financial period? Is the evaluation a tool for the adaptation to the changing environment or a tool to prove that programmes are working well?

The objective of the session is to critically reflect when starting preparations of the new programmes: are we maximizing our capacities for flexibility and adaptability? Can we do more?

## Approach

Flexibility and adaptability can be tackled at macro level (requires change in the legislation) and micro (can be implemented in programmes without regulatory adjustments).

<i>Examples</i>	
<b>Macro level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ thematically open PO/SO</li> <li>❖ define programme at PO level (instead of SO)</li> <li>❖ bigger flexibility in financing plan to shift without modifications</li> <li>❖ indicator targets – contingency?</li> </ul>
<b>Micro level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ targeted calls, mix of different call types</li> <li>❖ project selection procedure</li> <li>❖ new approaches to monitoring &amp; evaluation – lean monitoring/ shorter evaluation cycles, etc.</li> <li>❖ synergies with other programmes</li> <li>❖ different (more flexible) set up for innovation/ICT/digital/social innovation projects</li> </ul>

During the session, following a brief overview, participants were invited to pick the most pressing issue as they saw it, and to reflect on:

- What is working?
- What requires repairing / improvements?
- What is missing?
- What would be your vision for the future?

### Key discussion points

Interreg is not intended as a crisis management tool; rather, it is designed to achieve long-term objectives. However, flexibility is essential for effective implementation. One key aspect of enhancing flexibility and adaptability is to place greater trust in programmes, Monitoring Committees, and beneficiaries, while reducing regulation.

**What works:** freedom to choose types of projects and call types, ISO1, thematic POs.

**What does not work / requires improvements:** intervention codes, state aid in Interreg, rigid financial targets pushing artificially the spending rate and reducing possibilities for meaningful interventions.

### Ideas to increase flexibility:

- “Mid-term review” - as a way to adapt to the evolving needs without the programme modification procedure. It could be triggered after certain % of the budget allocation (with a light procedure). However, linking the mid-term review to certain % allocation may raise questions in case funds are unspent because priorities become irrelevant and projects are not being submitted as anticipated.
- Innovation priority to include also social innovation.
- It is not enough to have thematically open POs and ISO1 if there are no corresponding codes of interventions. Look at POs and potentially SOs from a systematic perspective – if there are also corresponding indicators available, and how rigid and appropriate are codes of intervention.
- Indicators targets – be more flexible, to avoid artificial achievements of the indicators’ targets, setting more ambitious targets with ability to fail. Failing is a sign of ambition and innovation.
- There is an artificial division of SOs under PO. Split into SOs was only seen as beneficial to allow building synergies between programmes. It was also mentioned that SOs could be defined on the programme level by MC. Flexibility for defining financing and indicators on PO-level (not SO level) and more flexibility to change and adapt instead of forcing beneficiaries to keep the course which was initially planned but no relevant anymore. Important to focus on actual/changed needs.
- More decision-making power to the MC.
- Use of advance payments particularly for NGO’s and projects with citizens.
- Reserve budget at project level for crises or inflation situations.
- Increased flexibility on N+3 (especially during the first years). The current pressure to meet spending targets result in artificial acceleration of spending which can hinder the implementation of meaningful interventions.

- Exploring thematically open PO: certain perc. of the PO is not defined (20-30%) – possibility to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Strategic environmental assessment to be skipped. It is not relevant to a high-level strategic document, but rather for concrete investment projects.

### **Conclusions, plans for follow up**

Agreements on specific priorities and approaches is not only crucial for demonstrating accountability to the EC but also for fostering internal consensus among member states regarding the achievement of certain goals within a designated period. In the end we must prove that funding was spent in the meaningful way. Maintaining an open-ended approach could pose challenges in proving Interreg's contribution.

The discussion outcomes from this session will feed into further debate about post 2027.

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