

# Decision making and conflict of interest

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

## Overview

A smooth and meaningful decision-making process is vital to the credibility of Interreg programmes. Fully aware of this aspect, the participants explored diverse approaches, instruments and practices put in place by programmes to address and mitigate conflict of interest, contributing to an effective decision-making environment.

## Session agenda

### *Introduction from Interact*

Glimpse into context and setting the scene  
The selection process – key steps  
Potential risks during the selection process

### ***Decision-making and Col - Oana Mantog, Team Leader, Joint Audit Directorate for Cohesion***

What is conflict of interest (Col) and why do we want to avoid it?  
Who is concerned in shared management?  
When are we in conflict of interest?  
What to do? Programme level.

### ***Programmes approaches***

**Andrea Kasanicka Kostolna & Andrej Batyás, Interreg Slovakia – Austria**  
**Merike Niitepõld, Interreg Central Baltic**

### *Joint reflection and discussion*

## Methodology

Together with 38 programmes representatives we exchanged on decision-making processes within various programmes. The discussion was focused on:

- The challenges faced during decision-making process,
- The governance mechanisms employed by managing authorities across different programme bodies (e.g., Joint Secretariat, external experts, and Monitoring Committee), and

- How programmes ensure the selection of relevant projects in a fair and transparent process as per ECA report recommendation: to prioritise and award support to projects by ranking them based on merit. Is this recommendation aligned with the decision-making process in Interreg programmes?
- How can Interreg programmes establish a consistent policy framework and a comprehensive set of instruments to avoid Col?

## Programmes testimonials

### Andrea Kasanicka Kostolna and Andrej Batyás, Interreg Slovakia – Austria

The decision-making in Slovakia – Austria programme follows a structured approach:

**Advisory nominations:** engaging representatives of the regions participating in the programme and other advisory members that enriches the monitoring committee meeting discussions.

**MC Meeting setup:** the programme organizes meetings based on location and a rotational principle for inclusive participation.

**Trust in selection:** transparent assessment and selection of project managers and staff foster stakeholder trust.

**Ranking importance:** the programme prioritizes project quality over ranking in decision-making.

**Rules of Procedure:** consensus-based decisions in the MC. Sometimes it requires pre-meetings for thorough discussion.

**Implementation flexibility:** assessment teams, which follow the 4-eye principle with internal assessors, are encouraged to adopt procedures, like the "put on hold procedure," that suit their programme's needs.

### Merike Niitepõld, Interreg Central Baltic Programme

Effective decision-making: Reflecting on 2014-2020 experience and implementing in 2021-2027

Over the past years (2014-2020), the decision-making process in Interreg Central Baltic programme has evolved, leading to improvements in programme management. The programme recognizes the importance of enhancing skills and knowledge through Monitoring Committee (MC) training.

In particular, the training focus on the following key areas:

**Programme content familiarization:** For the first time, programme content went through in-person training sessions. This hands-on approach ensures that MC members have a thorough understanding of the programme's objectives, strategies, and challenges.

**Assessment methodology:** Training also covers assessment methodologies to equip MC members with the tools and techniques needed to evaluate projects effectively. This includes understanding criteria for project selection, performance indicators and impact assessment.

**Division of tasks:** Clarifying the division of tasks between the Joint Secretariat (JS) and the MC is crucial for smooth operations. The training provides guidance on delineating responsibilities, promoting collaboration and ensuring accountability within the team.

By investing in training and capacity-building initiatives, the programme aims to strengthen our decision-making processes and drive greater impact in the years ahead.

### Joint reflection and discussion

- Pre-discussion of decisions by MC

Some programmes mentioned that pre-discussions occur among Member States, mainly for understanding strategic topics rather than directly discussing decisions.

- Trust and Conflict of Interest

Trust was highlighted as crucial in monitoring committee decisions and managing conflicts of interest. MC members should abstain from discussions or decisions where there's a conflict of interest.

Training of MC members is conducted through task force involvement, indicating a proactive approach to enhancing expertise and professionalism within the members.

- Discussion about excluding an MC member from the decision-making due to Col:

Another aspect of the discussion was regarding the exclusion of a MC member, potentially impacting a project or a ranking list as an agenda point. The MC decided to maintain the project but to continue the discussion without the presence of the MC member involved in - suggesting a commitment to open dialogue and consensus-building.

- Mitigating and reducing conflict of interest risk:

Setting clear assessment criteria for the selection of projects help mitigate the risk of conflicts of interest.

This emphasizes the importance of ensuring impartiality and integrity in decision-making processes.

- Channelling prioritization challenges:

Participants acknowledged that prioritization can be challenging, particularly due to political agendas among MC members.

This highlights the complexity of balancing various interests and agendas within the MC of Interreg programmes.

## **Reflections, plans for follow up**

Interact will continue to coordinate follow-up actions facilitating exchanges among programmes based on the insights gained from the session discussions.

Collection of instruments, proceedings and good practices relevant to decision-making processes and the prevention, mitigation, and avoidance of conflicts of interest (Col) across programmes will be carried out.

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