Site visits and risk assessment

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

Overview

Interact has continuously supported the monitoring tools for site visits with dedicated events on management verifications in 2020, online checks in 2020, and on-the-spot checks in 2023. The logical continuation of these efforts was the Interreg Knowledge Fair session on site visits and risk assessment.

The session's main objective was to explore how to improve the risk assessment process by including more information from the site visits. More discussion is needed to ensure a better exchange of monitoring information between the different programme management bodies and within the different programme actors. However, the need for a separate visual identifier for Interreg remains extremely popular.

Methodology

The session started with an introduction to the monitoring process, carried out through different formal and informal tools. These tools serve the same purpose—obtaining information on progress and risks/problems in project implementation. The main tools include progress reporting, site visits, and consultation with project partners. Of these forms, only the site visits allow for presenting the programme's and beneficiaries' perspectives.

After that was detailed the definition of risk assessment as a continuous, forward-looking process and addresses issues that could endanger the achievement of the programme objectives. A continuous risk management approach is applied to effectively anticipate and mitigate the risks that have critical impact on each project as well as the cumulative effect of all risks at the programme level.

The session continued with the first step in the risk assessment and the main risk categories, including:

➢ Institutional Risks - assessment of the project management and the project partnership.
➢ Operational Risks - assessment of the project performance - planning and implementation of activities, methods, standards and systems. Achievement of indicators.
➢ Procurement Risks - assessment of the procurement planning, management, compliance with procurement rules and the principles of sound financial management, transparency, sufficient audit trail.
➢ Financial Risks - assessment of the financial liabilities associated with the projects, including operational and maintenance costs, own contribution, financial reporting, etc.

Key discussion points

The discussion included all participants and covered the following questions:
1. How to harmonize the templates?

The main suggestion was to ensure that there is a short section in the template for site visits that identified risks and summarizes them for further assessment.

2. Should we conclude each site visit with risk assessment?

All participants united that risk assessment should not always follow site visits, but should be organized periodically, for all projects in implementation.

3. How to follow up on what happens after risk assessment?

Most participants agreed that initiating site visits after a risk assessment is an appropriate way to ensure follow-up. Also, a risk assessment in the contracting phase must be carried out to ensure smooth project implementation. One of the most interesting suggestions was to deliver relevant training to project partners, depending on the identified risks and difficulties in project implementation, which will help build up their capacity for project management. Another suggestion was to implement continuous monitoring on the phone to collect the most recent information on the status of the implementation of risk assessment recommendations.

4. How often should we carry out risk assessment?

Almost unanimously, the participants established that risk assessment is to be carried out once per year.

5. How to ensure simplification & efficiency?

One of the most interesting suggestions was to organize sample-based risk assessment.

6. Who should be responsible?

All participants agreed that risk assessment should be organized by the JS, with the possibility of being done by a risk assessment officer or a risk assessment workgroup. However, in the case of a more centralised programme management approach, the MA could perform this role.

Conclusions, plans for followed up

The session was concluded with the general motion to abolish the barriers between the programme management bodies and the project partners. This would allow for a more friendly and trust-based approach, which guarantees efficient monitoring.

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