



*FROM SHARED RESOURCES
TO JOINT SOLUTIONS*

**INTERREG V-A ITALY CROATIA CBC PROGRAMME 2014-2020
EVALUATION SERVICE**

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Operational Evaluation 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2

1	Analysis of the implementation status of the Programme	4
1.1	Programme’s Calls for proposals	6
1.1.1	<i>Standard+ call</i>	7
1.1.2	<i>Standard call</i>	8
1.1.3	<i>Strategic call</i>	9
1.1.4	<i>Cluster call</i>	11
1.2	Overall funded projects	12
1.3	Financial progress	13
2	The use of different approaches in the ITA-HR Interreg programme	18
3	The use of financial savings: some insights for a comparative analysis	27
3.1	Type of procedure implemented: open-ended and closed-ended	27
3.2	The simplified cost options after the “Omnibus proposal”	29
3.3	Types of procedures and programming objectives	30
3.3.1	<i>Closed, targeted and/or restricted calls</i>	30
3.3.2	<i>Capitalisation calls</i>	32
3.3.3	<i>Calls and other financial instruments aiming at consolidating impacts and effects of projects already funded in previous calls</i>	34
3	Final considerations and recommendations	36
4	Annexes	39
Annex 1: Slides presented during the Focus Group		39
Annex 2: Questionnaire used during the Focus Group (through <i>mentimeter</i>)		42

Introduction

This document represents the draft of the third Operational Evaluation for the year 2023 of the Evaluation Service of the INTERREG V A ITALY CROATIA CBC Programme 2014-2020.

The Evaluation service includes three operational evaluation reports throughout the Evaluation service in order to assess the Programme's outputs and outcomes and the administrative capacities of its Programme bodies.

Each operational evaluation report focuses on specific elements. In particular, following the participatory approach which characterizes the Evaluation Service, the topics analysed in the present operational evaluation report have been set in advance, thanks to the interaction with the Programme bodies.

To offer a complete picture, it is useful to mention that the first Operational Evaluation 2021 provided a first snapshot of the implementation of the Programme by analysing some key elements including the management system, the result indicators system and the partnerships created. As proposed in the Operational Evaluation 2021, the second Operational Evaluation focussed on additional dimensions of the Programme, in particular the Evaluator answered to the evaluation questions related to the cross-border cooperation added value and networking, conducting additional analysis on the type of partners and on the implementing unit locations. Moreover, the report presented an additional analysis of the output indicators and its targets.

The operational evaluation to be delivered in March 2023 is meant to draw the final considerations regarding the financial and procedural progress of the programme. This will include an overview on standard, standard+, strategic and cluster projects. The Evaluator will also update the output indicators. Following a needs assessment with the MA, it also emerged the need to investigate two more topics. On one hand, the MA asked the Evaluator to conduct an analysis on the use of left-over resources, demanding an analytical comparison of other programs and the definition of a set of good practices usable according to Italian legal framework; on the other, MA requires an evaluation of the different approaches used in the drafting of various calls to assess their efficacy and efficiency. For the latter, the ultimate objective, considering a set of key drivers, is to investigate whether and how the different approaches adopted for the calls triggered distinct results. More participating processes might have been more beneficial to build long-lasting networks while more vertical and hierarchic projects have had a better result-oriented approach.

Reverting to the present report, since structuring work of the new Programme is currently underway, the report aims to represent a tool capable of providing the decision-maker with useful suggestions in the definition and, subsequently, in the implementation of the new Programme.

The evaluation activity for drafting the report includes desk analysis are based on a hybrid approach, involving a mix of different data gathering and analytical methods:

- **Desk analysis** of data extracted from the SIU, concerning the partnerships created with specific focus on type of bodies, legal seat country and implementing unit locations.
 - The desk analysis allows for the creation of graphs and tables to assess a) the geographical distribution of the partnerships, and of the lead partners in particular and b) the partnership composition.
 - In addition, this method was useful to tackle the two additional topics identified by the MA. While the use of left out resources will certainly need a comprehensive and extensive research of what other programs are doing, the other topic that has to be analyzed will require a careful reading of the different calls published by the MA and the reports released by the beneficiaries. This will represent the main step to understand whether different approaches set by the authority had diversified results.
- **Participatory tool (i.e. focus group)** the analysis of the different approaches used by the MA was not only based on desk analysis but the IE involved the Lead Partners of Cluster and Strategic projects in an

event in which they were able to provide their assessment of the topic. Such events are useful because they provide interesting insights but they are also an opportunity to gather different stakeholders. Furthermore, it was also a moment dedicated to a capacity building exercise for some of the participants. The IE used *mentimeter*, an interactive software, to allow the participants to give their opinion on the topics and the results represent a great source of information that gave more depth to the analysis.

1 Analysis of the implementation status of the Programme

The INTERREG VA ITALY CROATIA CBC PROGRAMME 2014-2020, adopted by the European Commission with the Decision C (2015) 9342 of 15 December 2015, has an overall budget of EUR 236.890.849, including EUR 201.357.220 (85%) from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and EUR 35.533.629 (15%) from national co-financing.

With an area of more than 85.500 km² and a population of more than 12.4 million inhabitants, the eligible area of the Italy-Croatia Programme extends along the two shores of the Adriatic, including 33 statistical NUTS III territories (25 provinces in Italy and 8 counties in Croatia), as showed in figure 2.

Figure 2: Italy-Croatia cooperation area 14-20

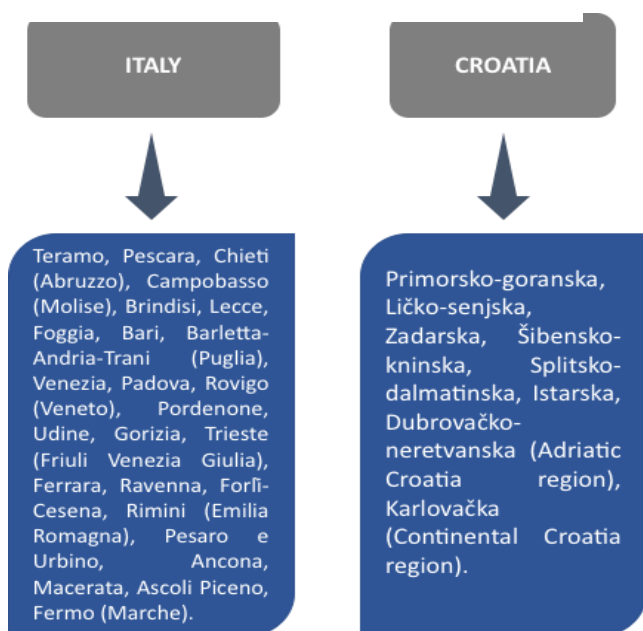
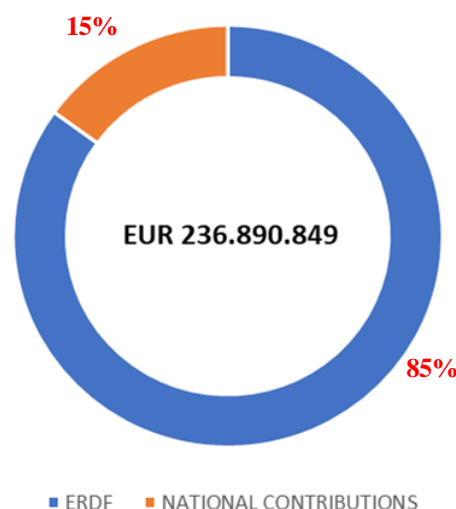


Figure 1: Programme's budget



In order to achieve the overall objective linked to the increase of the prosperity and of the blue growth potential of the area by stimulating cross-border partnerships able to achieve tangible changes, the Programme is structured in **four Priority Axes (PA)**, focusing on the blue economy in terms of innovation, maritime transportation, climate change, adaptation, environmental security and sustainability, and on the natural and cultural heritage as a driving force for sustainable and more balanced territorial development by integrating rural areas and

ensuring a better spatial distribution of visitor flows; plus a fifth Priority Axes for Technical Assistance. Under each PA, the Programme is articulated in 7 Specific Objectives (SOs): **SO 1.1** aims at improving the performance of the Programme area in the field of innovation by establishing and developing mechanisms which contribute to a better exploitation of the existing potential; **SO 2.1** intends to improve the climate change monitoring and planning of measures for strengthening the adaptation capacity of the region while increasing the resilience of the territory including its natural environment; **SO 2.2** aims at improving the safety the Programme area supporting the development of disaster management systems, furthering the capacity of recovery while minimising damages; **SO 3.1** seeks to reach a higher level of sustainable economic and territorial development by exploiting the potentials of the natural assets and cultural heritage while preserving them and increasing their value; **SO 3.2** aims at strengthening of the management and protection of ecosystems and the cooperation between public actors/ managers of the protected areas in order to increase environmental benefits and to provide economic and employment opportunities; **SO 3.3** aims at improving the environmental quality conditions of the sea and coastal area by use of sustainable and innovative technologies and approaches; finally **SO 4.1** is intended to improve the quality, safety and environmental sustainability of marine and coastal transport services. The full logical framework of the Programme is included in Annex 1.

The table below shows the financial plan of the Programme.

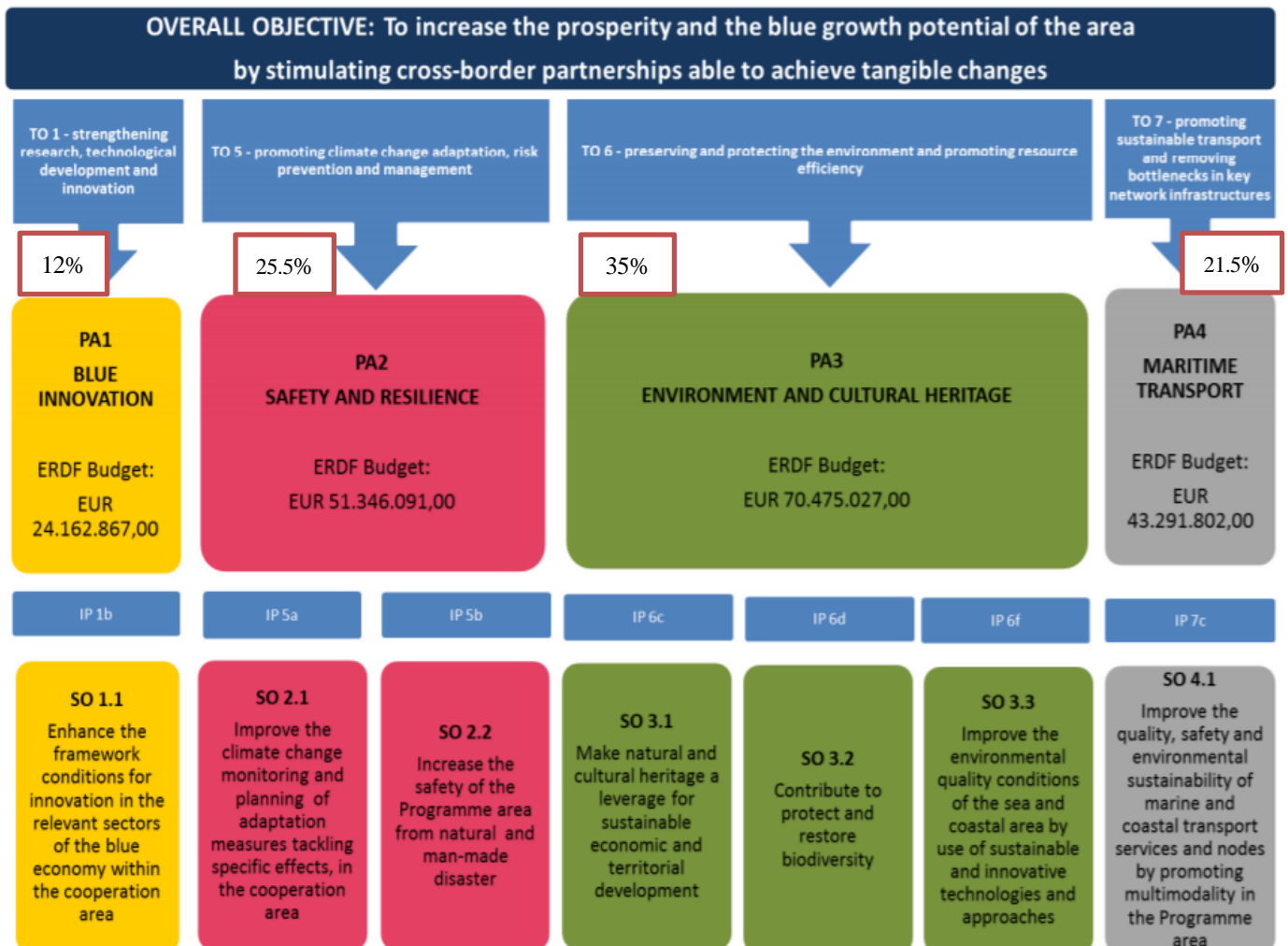
Table 1: Programme’s Financial Plan

	FINANCIAL PLAN	
	TOTAL	ERDF
Priority Axis 1	28.426.903,00	24.162.867,55
Priority Axis 2	60.407.166,00	51.346.091,10
Priority Axis 3	82.911.797,00	70.475.027,45
Priority Axis 4	50.931.532,00	43.291.802,20
Priority Axis 5	14.213.451,00	12.081.433,35
TOTAL	236.890.849,00	201.357.221,65

Source: Data from SIU

It follows that the funds allocated to Priority Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4 (corresponding to the selected Thematic Objectives 1, 5, 6 and 7) amount to 94% of the Programme’s financial resources, as showed by the figure below; while the remaining 6% is allocated to Technical Assistance. The figure below shows also that most of the funds (35%) have been allocated to PA3 “Environmental and Cultural Heritage”.

Figure 3: Programme’s intervention logic



Source: INTERREG V A Italy – Croatia CBC Programme

1.1 Programme's Calls for proposals

The Programme has launched until this moment **four calls for proposals, two of them in 2017, one in 2019 and the last one in 2021.**

In particular, in 2017 it has been published a first set of calls including 1 call for **Standard+** projects and 1 call **Standard** projects, targeting all Priority Axes; and 1 call for Technical Assistance (TA) in order to propose to the Monitoring Committee the approval of 5 TA projects. In 2019, a call for proposal for **Strategic projects** was launched and closed and, finally, on 20th October 2021, the Programme has launched a **Restricted Cluster Call for Proposals** dedicated to the funding of IT-HR cluster projects in 5 different thematic areas in order to maximize experiences and results achieved by the Programme through the implementation of Standard+ and Standard Projects. The call has been closed on 14th December 2021.

The calls for proposals for Standard+, Standard and Strategic projects were addressed to:

- National, regional and local public bodies and associations formed by one or several of such public bodies;
- Bodies governed by public law, and associations constituted by one or several bodies governed by public law;
- Private bodies, including private companies, having legal personality and being operational from at least 2 fiscal years at the time of submission of the candidature, with some restrictions detailed in the different calls;
- International organisations acting under the Italian or Croatian national law and being operational from at least 2 fiscal years at the time of submission of the candidature.

Moreover, for Strategic projects in particular, a list of eligible categories of partners to be involved in the projects was defined for each strategic theme, on the basis of the institutional and technical competence and know-how.

The above-mentioned eligible categories had to be established under the national law of Italy or Croatia and had to have their official seat and their seat of operations in the part of the country included in the Programme area.

- The only exception to this rule concerns the **Assimilated partners**, which are institutions that are competent and relevant in their scope of action for all or part of the eligible area or are anyhow relevant due to specific and exclusive thematic competence for the eligible area but which are located outside of it. Assimilated partners have equal rights and obligations to applicants located within the Programme area.

In addition to the Assimilated partners, the Programme includes also the category of **Associated partners**, meaning those key stakeholders which are interested in the project results and which are relevant to be involved in the project for planning, developing and sustaining outputs and results but without financially contributing to it and without receiving ERDF funding. All requirements regarding project partners apply also to associated partners.

Applications for participating in the selection were submitted through the Electronic Management and Monitoring System (SIU) and the assessment of the applications was performed by the Joint Secretariat (JS) under the responsibility of the Managing Authority.

1.1.1 Standard+ call

The Standard+ call was open from March to May 2017 for a limited period of 45 days. It aimed at funding projects stemming from existing cooperation potentials of the area – capitalising the achievements of the previous programming period - by means of piloting, testing or implementing in the Programme area solutions developed in a larger scale context and in the framework of a 2007 – 2013 ETC Programmes in which Italian and Croatian partners already worked together (Adriatic IPA CBC, SEE and MED).

Each “Standard+” project had to involve **at least three partners**, out of which at least one Croatian partner that was member of the partnership of the previously financed project and at least one Italian partner that was member of the partnership of the previously financed project.

The ERDF budget allocated to fund the Standard+ projects, which represents 85% of the call’s total budget, amounted originally to EUR 15.000.000, which were increased by 19% after the submission of the project applications to reach EUR 18.571.411,03, as showed in the table below, mostly due to the increase in the amount available for Priority Axis 3 (54%).

Table 2: Budget for the Standard+ procedure

Call	ERDF Budget at call opening	Total budget at call opening	Final ERDF budget after refinancing	Final total budget after refinancing
2017 Standard+	15.000.000,00	17.647.058,82	18.571.411,03	21.848.718,86
Priority Axis 1	4.200.000,00	4.941.176,47	2.445.990,09	2.877.635,40
Priority Axis 2	2.600.000,00	3.058.823,53	2.656.413,03	3.125.191,80
Priority Axis 3	4.200.000,00	4.941.176,47	9.139.515,06	10.752.370,66
Priority Axis 4	4.000.000,00	4.705.882,35	4.329.492,85	5.093.521,00

Source: Data from SIU

The above-mentioned substantial increase of budget for Priority Axis 3 can be explained in terms of **interest showed by the beneficiaries for PA3**. Indeed, 24 proposals have been presented for the Standard+ call, 13 of them under PA3. Overall, all 24 proposals were admitted but only 22 proposals passed the quality assessment and have been eventually funded, according to the breakdown per priority axis showed below: under PA3, the Programme has funded 11 projects on the 13 applications received, while for the other Axis all the projects presented have been funded.

Table 3: Standard+ Projects funded

Call	Proposals received	Requested budget	Admitted project proposals	Requested budget for approved project proposal	Approved budget	Average budget for approved projects	Average N° of partners for project
Standard+	24	23.544.788,86	22	21.848.718,86	21.848.718,86	993.123,59	6,7
PA1	3	2.877.635,40	3	2.877.635,40	2.877.635,40	959.211,83	6,3
PA2	3	3.125.191,80	3	3.125.191,80	3.125.191,80	1.041.730,60	5,6
PA3	13	12.448.440,66	11	10.752.370,66	10.752.370,66	977.488,24	7
PA4	5	5.093.521,00	5	5.093.521,00	5.093.521,00	1.018.704,20	6,8

Source: Data from SIU

The table also shows the average budget of the funded projects which amounts to 993.123,59 EUR and the average number of partners which is equal to 6,7 for the Standard+ projects.

1.1.2 Standard call

The call for Standard projects was open from April to June 2017 for a longer period of 60 days with an original total allocation of EUR 63.200.000 from ERDF. After the selection of the projects, this overall amount has increased **by nearly 60%** to EUR 100.914.492,19, as showed in the following table, with an increase in all PA, especially in PA3. Moreover, in 2021, there have been some changes in projects budgets of PA2 and PA3 that have resulted in a slight decrease in the overall budget of the call, which is presently 100.846.176,76 EUR from the ERDF fund.

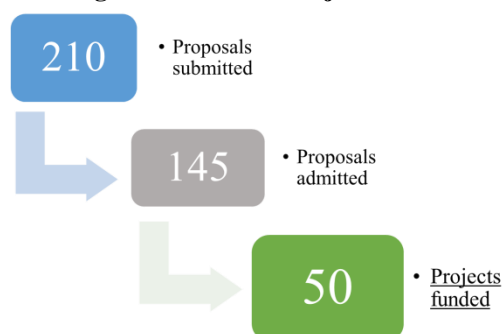
Table 4: Budget for the Standard procedure

PA	Budget at call opening	Budget at call opening	Budget of the call after projects' selection	Budget of the call after projects' selection	Budget of the call after revision in 2021	Budget of the call after revision in 2021
	ERDF	Total	ERDF	Total	ERDF	Total
2017 Standard	63.200.000,00	74.352.941,18	100.914.492,19	118.722.931,99	100.846.176,76	118.642.561,40
Priority Axis 1	11.470.000,00	13.494.117,65	16.599.928,02	19.529.327,09	16.599.927,98	19.529.327,09
Priority Axis 2	9.200.000,00	10.823.529,41	19.085.413,93	22.453.428,16	19.024.341,34	22.381.578,16
Priority Axis 3	29.700.000,00	34.941.176,47	44.480.016,42	52.329.431,09	44.472.773,72	52.320.910,50
Priority Axis 4	12.830.000,00	15.094.117,65	20.749.133,80	24.410.745,65	20.749.133,72	24.410.745,65

Source: Data from SIU

The call for standard projects received great attention from the beneficiaries, so much that at the closure of the procedure, 210 project proposals were received, 145 that reached the minimum threshold for funding and then 50 finally funded, namely 24% of the proposals received.

Figure 4: Standard Projects funded



Source: Data from SIU

The call has been conceived to fund projects that originated from the acknowledgement of a problem or a need and aiming at testing a potential solution. Each “Standard” project had to involve **at least four partners**, located in each of the two countries of the Programme area (at least one per country).

The breakdown by priority axis showed below highlights, also in this case, the great interest from beneficiaries for Priority Axis 3, which has attracted 59% of the total proposals received. Under PA3, 123 project proposals were submitted, 75 were admitted and then 22 projects were funded.

Table 5: Standard Projects funded

Call	Proposals received	Requested budget	Admitted project proposals	Requested budget for admitted project proposal	Selected projects	Approved budget after projects selection	% selected on presented projects
Standard	210	431.916.843,84	145	308.887.237,14	50	118.722.931,99	25,3%
PA1	42	83.871.103,10	34	70.097.169,35	8	19.529.327,09	19,0%
PA2	30	62.740.859,71	23	49.624.706,66	10	22.453.428,16	34,5%
PA3	123	247.852.434,98	75	156.388.935,08	22	52.329.431,09	19,5%
PA4	15	37.452.446,05	13	32.776.426,05	10	24.410.745,65	71,4%

Source: Data from SIU

To complement this analysis, the following table shows the average projects' budget and the average number of partners of Standard projects updated at end of 2021. It follows that Standard projects are larger than Standard+ projects in terms of budget (average budget 2.372.851,23 EUR compared to 993.123,59 EUR of Standard+ projects) and partnerships (9,5 average number of partners compared to 6,7).

Table 6: Standard projects average budget and N° of partners

Call	Selected projects	Approved budget after selection of projects	Average budget for approved projects in 2021	Average N° of partners for project
Standard	50	118.722.931,99	2.372.851,23	9,5
PA1	8	19.529.327,09	2.441.165,89	10
PA2	10	22.453.428,16	2.238.157,82	8,8
PA3	22	52.329.431,09	2.378.223,20	9,4
PA4	10	24.410.745,65	2.441.074,57	9,9

Source: Data from SIU

1.1.3 Strategic call

The call launched in 2019 by the Programme aimed at funding **Strategic Projects**. It was launched on 1st October 2019 for a period of 60 days until end of November 2019. With an initial financial allocation of EUR 82.015.294,11, it aimed at funding projects within 11 strategic themes covering the 4 Programme's Priority Axes, following an **institutional top-down approach**. Indeed, the call for Strategic Projects and the identification of the **11 strategic themes** was the result of a preparatory work conducted by the Monitoring Committee of the Programme, through the establishment of a dedicated Working Group and involving national authorities and relevant institutions in both Italy and Croatia. This preparatory work has included the recognition of the needs of strategic cross-border relevance stemming from the Programme area, the strategic nature of the identified themes and the importance of giving a common and cross-border solution to the identified needs emerged. Therefore, 11 strategic themes were identified as follows:

1.1.1) Blue technology; 2.1.1) Climate change adaptation; 2.2.1) Flood risk; 2.2.2) Oil spills and other marine hazards, fire and earthquake; 3.1.1) Coastal and inland tourism; 3.2.1) Marine environment; 3.2.2) Fisheries and aquaculture; 3.3.1) Marine Litter; 4.1.1) Maritime Transport; 4.1.2) Mobility of Passengers; 4.1.3) Nautical services.

Moreover, the strategic projects to be funded had to be characterised by:

- principle of wide-area partnerships, i.e.: the involvement of a higher number of beneficiaries than the minimum eligible partnership requirement as set in the Cooperation Programme;
- width of the involved territories to ensure that greater Programme area population benefits from the achieved results;
- higher financial allocations than those foreseen for standard projects;
- specific and targeted institutional and technical skills and know how to ensure deeper/long-lasting impacts and benefits for the whole cooperation area.

Each strategic project had to involve at least 3 Croatian and 3 Italian eligible partners. Furthermore, the call allowed the participation in the projects of **associated partners**, namely key stakeholders that could be involved in a project without financially contributing to it and without receiving ERDF funding.

As mentioned, for this call the **budget** was allocated **per strategic theme** as showed below, and it eventually reached the ERDF amount of EUR 69.068.096,72 after the selection of the projects.

Table 7: Allocation of funds for Strategic projects

	Call	ERDF budget at call opening	Total Budget at call opening	ERDF Final budget of the call	Total final budget of the call
PA	2019 Strategic	69.713.000,00	82.015.294,11	69.068.096,72	81.256.584,49
PA1	Theme 1.1.1	5.116.000,00	6.018.823,53	4.722.392,10	5.555.755,45
PA2	Theme 2.1.1	7.500.000,00	8.823.529,41	7.499.902,75	8.823.415,00
	Theme 2.2.1	8.000.000,00	9.411.764,71	7.999.909,13	9.411.657,83
	Theme 2.2.2	14.029.000,00	16.504.705,88	14.018.879,65	16.492.799,60
PA3	Theme 3.1.1	3.200.000,00	3.764.705,88	3.199.991,33	3.764.695,71
	Theme 3.2.1	4.945.000,00	5.817.647,06	4.944.914,95	5.817.547,00
	Theme 3.2.2	4.945.000,00	5.817.647,06	4.866.381,75	5.725.155,00
	Theme 3.3.1	3.765.000,00	4.429.411,76	3.608.017,10	4.244.726,00
PA4	Theme 4.1.1	6.071.000,00	7.142.352,94	6.070.700,00	7.142.000,00
	Theme 4.1.2	6.071.000,00	7.142.352,94	6.069.000,00	7.140.000,00
	Theme 4.1.3	6.071.000,00	7.142.352,94	6.068.007,96	7.138.832,90

Source: Data from SIU

The call announcement for strategic projects stated the expectation that 1 strategic project would have been funded for each theme, and this is what happened at the closure of the call. Indeed, 11 projects have been funded, one for each strategic theme, on 13 proposals received. This is because, as showed in the table below, for thematic objectives 3.2.1 and 3.3.1 two projects were received, but just one was approved and then funded.

Table 8: Strategic Projects funded

	Call	Proposals received	Requested budget	Selected Projects	Requested budget for approved project proposals	Approved budget after selection of projects	Average budget for approved projects	Average N° of partners for project
PA	Strategic Theme	13	86.617.186,07	11	81.256.584,49	81.256.584,49	7.386.962,23	17,8
PA1	1.1.1	1	5.555.755,45	1	5.555.755,45	5.555.755,45	5.555.755,45	14
PA2	2.1.1	1	8.823.415,00	1	8.823.415,00	8.823.415,00	11.575.957,48	18,3

	Call	Proposals received	Requested budget	Selected Projects	Requested budget for approved project proposals	Approved budget after selection of projects	Average budget for approved projects	Average N° of partners for project
	2.2.1	1	9.411.657,83	1	9.411.657,83	9.411.657,83		
	2.2.2	1	16.492.799,60	1	16.492.799,60	16.492.799,60		
PA3	3.1.1	1	3.764.695,71	1	3.764.695,71	3.764.695,71	4.888.030,93	15,5
	3.2.1	2	9.223.673,20	1	5.817.547,00	5.817.547,00		
	3.2.2	1	5.725.155,00	1	5.725.155,00	5.725.155,00		
	3.3.1	2	6.199.201,38	1	4.244.726,00	4.244.726,00		
PA4	4.1.1	1	7.142.000,00	1	7.142.000,00	7.142.000,00	7.140.277,63	16,2
	4.1.2	1	7.140.000,00	1	7.140.000,00	7.140.000,00		
	4.1.3	1	7.138.832,90	1	7.138.832,90	7.138.832,90		

Source: Data from SIU

1.1.4 Cluster call

The **Restricted Cluster Call for Proposals** of the Interreg V-A Italy-Croatia CBC Programme is dedicated to the funding of **IT-HR cluster** projects in 5 different thematic areas in order to maximize experiences and results achieved by the Programme through the implementation of **Standard+** and **Standard Projects**.

It has been opened from **20th October to 14th December 2021** and allocated **2.550.000,00 € from ERDF fund** to finance projects “**IT-HR Cluster projects**” in **5 different thematic areas** as illustrated in the following table:

N°	Cluster	Maximum ERDF budget	Maximum budget for national co-financing	Maximum total budget
1	Connectivity from the sea: data driven solution in the sea economy	510.000,00	90.000,00	600.000,00
2	Joint development of thematic cultural routes	510.000,00	90.000,00	600.000,00
3	Marine monitoring as a tool in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)	510.000,00	90.000,00	600.000,00
4	Improving quality, efficiency and environmental performance of Adriatic ports	510.000,00	90.000,00	600.000,00
5	Improving quality, efficiency and environmental performance of Adriatic ports	510.000,00	90.000,00	600.000,00
		2.550.000	450.000	3.000.000

In order to be an eligible partner/lead partner within each of the 5 Clusters, an organization had to be already LP or PP (also Assimilated) of one of the Standard+ or Standard projects listed in the call announcement identified on the basis of their contribution to and compliance with the specific theme of each cluster. The Call envisaged that 1 IT-HR cluster project had to be funded per each cluster theme.

In terms of partnership, the call announced that each project had to involve at least three partners, out of which at least one Croatian partner involved in Standard or Standard+ project and at least one Italian partner involved in Standard or Standard+ project. Moreover, the partnership involved had bring the know-how and experience

from at least 3 different projects belonging to the same IT-HR Cluster from the list indicated. The maximum number of partners per each cluster project was set at 8.

The proposals received have been assessed and the Monitoring Committee has approved the final ranking list to fund 5 projects with the available budget out of the 9 proposals received (all eligible) and, in this regard, it has given mandate to the JS to start the condition clearing phase of the 5 projects as soon as possible. Moreover, the MC has instructed the Managing Authority to look for additional savings from Standard projects in order to fund more proposals from the Cluster ranking list¹.

- During April 2022, after the fulfillment of the requirements of the technical assessment carried out by the Joint Secretariat, the Managing Authority proceeds to sign the Subsidy Contract with the Lead Partners of the projects eligible for funding ‘under conditions’ and accordingly to the financial commitment; at the same time, the Joint Secretariat carried out the check on the financial savings of Standard projects;
- in July 2022, in light of the financial resources made available, the Managing Authority proceeds with the funding of the additional 4 cluster projects eligible in the ranking list approved by the Monitoring Committee and consequently to sign the Subsidy Contract with the Lead Partners of the projects eligible but initially not funded.

The table below presents the 9 funded cluster projects.

Table 9: Cluster projects*

PA	SO	PROJECT ACRONYM	APPROVED BUDGET	APPROVED ERDF BUDGET
1	1.1	CLASS4.0	599.083,60	509.221,05
		TECHERA	600.000,00	510.000,00
2	2.1	CREATE	599.962,50	509.968,12
		SeCure	600.000,00	510.000,00
3	3.1	AdriPromTour	590.000,00	501.500,00
		BOOST5	597.325,00	507.726,25
	3.3	HATCH	566.621,00	481.627,85
4	4.1	RESISTANCE	599.675,00	509.723,75
		DIGSEA	599.430,00	509.515,50
GRAND TOTAL			5.352.097,10	4.549.282,52

* Highlighted in green are the projects accepted for funding in July 2022 following the check of financial availability

1.2 Overall funded projects

The following section presents an overview of the funded projects as of December 31, 2022. The number of projects financed by the Program, with the exception of those belonging to the Technical Assistance axis, is 92: 50 Standard, 22 Standard+, 11 Strategic, 9 Cluster; this activity corresponds to a total budget of 227,099,961.85 euros, according to the breakdown by priority axis shown in the table below.

The Axis 3 is confirmed as the one that collected the highest number of projects (45%) and the largest share of the program budget (37%), around 85 million euros. Axis 2 follows, with 27% of the allocated budget, over 61 million euros, in the 18 projects financed by the Programme. A similar quota of projects is financed in Axis 4

¹ Decreto del direttore della Unità Organizzativa ADG Italia-Croazia n. 71 del 11 marzo 2022

for a total of approximately 52 million euros (23%). Axis 1 is the one that has collected the least number of projects (14) and the lowest share of the budget (13%).

Table 10: Overall Funded Projects per PA

Priority Axis	Standard+	Standard	Strategic	Cluster	Grand total	%
PA1	2.877.635,40	19.529.327,09	5.555.755,45	1.199.083,60	29.161.801,54	13%
N° of projects	3	8	1	2	14	15%
PA2	3.125.191,80	22.381.578,16	34.727.872,43	1.199.962,50	61.434.604,89	27%
N° of projects	3	10	3	2	18	20%
PA3	10.752.370,66	52.320.910,50	19.552.123,71	2.353.621,00	84.979.025,87	37%
N° of projects	11	22	4	4	41	45%
PA4	5.093.521,00	24.410.745,65	21.420.832,90	599.430,00	51.524.529,55	23%
N° of projects	5	10	3	1	19	21%
Total N° of projects	22	50	11	9	92	100%
Total per call	21.848.718,86	118.642.561,40	81.256.584,49	5.352.097,10	227.099.961,85	100%
% per call	10%	52%	36%	2%	100%	

Source: Data from SIU

1.3 Financial progress

The **22 Standard+ projects**, being also the first call to be launched, have followed the quickest path and all of the projects were **concluded** as of the end of the year 2019 with a final budget reported, validated and paid of **EUR 20.024.882,60**, as showed in the table below.

Table 11: Financial Progress of Standard+ projects

Call and Priority Axis	Selected projects	Approved budget	Approved ERDF budget	Closed Projects as of December 2020	Budget reported and certified	% certified on approved budget
2017 Standard+	22	21.848.718,96	18.571.411,03	22	20.024.882,60	91,7%
1	3	2.877.635,50	2.445.990,17	3	2.565.942,58	89,2%
2	3	3.125.191,80	2.656.413,03	3	2.980.520,87	95,4%
3	11	10.752.370,66	9.139.514,99	11	10.190.292,04	94,8%
4	5	5.093.521,00	4.329.492,84	5	4.288.127,11	84,2%

Source: Data from SIU

The table also highlights the overall very good performance of the Standard+ projects, considering that **91,7% of the approved budget has been eventually certified to the EC**. The best performance has been achieved by the projects funded under Priority Axis 2 with its 3 projects which have certified the 95,4% of the budget, and the projects of the Axis 3, with its 11 projects reaching almost the 95%.

The **Standard projects** have started in late 2018 or beginning of 2019. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, requests for extension of project duration have been granted by the Programme to the beneficiaries: 22 Standard projects have been concluded during last year, while at the end of 2022 **the concluded projects were already 48 out of 50**. The following table shows their financial progress at the end of 2022. The certified expenditure

reached EUR 95 million compared to EUR 70 of last year. Project implementation therefore shows a significant increase, moving from 59% of certified expenditure of the 2021 to the 80% of the available budget in 2022.

The highest percentage of progress was achieved by the eight projects of the Axis 1 - all completed - which certified 84% of expenditure; this was followed by the projects of the Axis 3 (22 in total, of which only one was still ongoing at the end of 2022) which reached 82% of the available budget with the certified expenditure.

The **Strategic projects** have been launched in mid-2020 and their conclusion was planned for December 2022, and in one case in June 2023, nevertheless all the projects were still ongoing at the end of 2022. It has to be underlined that the activities of the strategic projects have been heavily affected by the COVID-pandemic. The financial progress has shown a fair acceleration compared to last year. Certified expenditures amount to about 25 million euros, which amounts to 30 percent of the available budget (EUR 81 million) -last year it was 13%.

Axis 1, with only one funded project, shows by far the greatest progress: in fact, certified expenditures have reached 71% of the available budget. It is well distanced followed by Axis 3, which, with its four funded projects, has certified 31% of the available budget.

Table 11: Financial Progress of Standard projects (validated amounts on 31st December 2022)

Call and Priority Axis	Ongoing Projects	Closed projects	Approved Budget in 2022	Approved ERDF budget in 2022	Total FLC validated amount	ERDF FLC validated amount	Total EC certified amount	ERDF EC certified amount	% ERDF certified on ERDF budget
2017 Standard	2	48	118.642.561,40	100.846.176,76	110.907.702,15	94.281.661,60	94.641.408,83	80.445.186,05	80%
1		8	19.529.327,09	16.599.927,98	18.789.914,42	15.971.425,20	16.430.553,29	13.965.968,27	84%
2		10	22.381.578,16	19.024.341,34	21.405.094,02	18.194.327,68	17.991.092,42	15.292.426,44	80%
3	1	21	52.320.910,50	44.472.773,72	49.382.894,40	41.975.454,72	42.716.842,91	36.309.311,49	82%
4	1	9	24.410.745,65	20.749.133,72	21.329.799,31	18.140.454,00	17.502.920,21	14.877.479,85	72%

Source: Data from SIU

Table 12: Financial Progress of Strategic projects (validated amounts on 31st December 2022)

Call and Priority Axis	Ongoing Projects	Approved Budget in 2022	Approved ERDF budget in 2022	Total FLC validated amount	ERDF FLC validated amount	Total EC certified amount	ERDF EC certified amount	% ERDF certified on ERDF budget
2019 Strategic Call	11	81.256.584,49	69.068.096,72	33.377.123,63	28.370.552,00	24.723.854,40	21.015.273,68	30%
1	1	5.555.755,45	4.722.392,10	3.953.920,73	3.360.832,40	3.953.920,73	3.360.832,40	71%
2	3	34.727.872,43	29.518.691,53	11.782.653,76	10.015.254,89	8.306.456,94	7.060.487,72	24%
3	4	19.552.123,71	16.619.305,13	8.090.101,65	6.876.585,38	6.115.595,92	5.198.255,68	31%
4	3	21.420.832,90	18.207.707,96	9.550.447,49	8.117.879,33	6.347.880,81	5.395.697,88	30%

Source: Data from SIU

Finally, in order to offer a complete picture, table 14 below shows the overall financial progress of the Programme by Priority Axis, including the technical assistance projects, as of December 2022. The overall amount certified to the EC is equal to EUR 147.519.953,44, of which **125.391.943,99** from ERDF budget. **The Programme has thus successfully met and exceeded its ERDF financial targets for year 2022**, which amounted to EUR 120.426.402,96.

Table 13: Financial Targets

TARGET N+3	
2017	-
2018	3.679.725,43
2019	18.716.243,36
2020	50.515.404,76
2021	85.084.937,36
2022	120.426.402,96
2023	201.357.220,00

Source: Data from SIU

Moreover, from the table below, it appears that the ERDF certified amount is 61% of the budget with a good improvement from the year 2021 where the percentage was 45. However, the low level of expenditure of the Strategic Projects has an impact on the performance of the overall Programme.

In any case, it has to be mentioned that there are **27 projects with activities still ongoing** (3 under PA1, 5 under PA2, 9 under PA3 and 5 under PA4).

Table 14: Programme's financial performance on 31 December 2022

Priority Axis	Projects	Status ²	Total Budget	ERDF Budget	Total FLC validated amount	ERDF FLC validated amount	Total EC certified amount	ERDF EC certified amount	% ERDF certified on budget
Grand Total	97	70 closed	240.976.092,83	204.829.678,26	173.282.826,67	669.965.921,71	147.519.953,44	125.391.943,99	61%
		27 ongoing							
PA 1	14	11 closed 3 ongoing	29.161.801,64	24.787.531,30	25.309.777,73	21.513.308,54	22.950.416,60	19.507.851,61	79%
PA 2	18	13 closed 5 ongoing	61.434.604,89	52.219.414,02	36.168.268,65	30.743.025,03	29.278.070,23	24.886.356,62	48%
PA 3	41	32 closed 9 ongoing	84.979.025,87	72.232.171,69	67.663.288,09	57.513.787,09	59.022.730,87	50.169.314,16	69%
PA 4	19	14 closed 5 ongoing	51.524.529,55	43.795.850,02	35.168.373,91	29.903.240,86	28.138.928,13	23.918.085,26	55%
PA 5	5	- 5 ongoing	13.876.130,88	11.794.711,23	8.973.118,29	530.292.560,19	8.129.807,61	6.910.336,34	59%

Source: Data from SIU

² The calculation refers to the projects with closed activities as of 31 December 2022.

2 The use of different approaches in the ITA-HR Interreg programme

Following a needs assessment with the MA it emerged the need to **investigate the different approaches** used in the drafting of **various calls** to assess their efficacy and efficiency. The main goal, considering a set of key drivers, is to investigate whether and how the different approaches adopted for the calls triggered distinct results.

More participating processes might have been more beneficial to build long-lasting networks while more vertical and hierarchic projects have had a better result-oriented approach. In this framework the Evaluator applied a **mix of methods** both **desk analysis** and a **participatory Focus Group** addressed to capture the added value of strategic interventions, i.e. strategic and cluster projects.

As defined in the Italy-Croatia Programme, “**strategic projects**” have to be characterized by:

- the principle of wide-area partnerships, i.e.: the involvement of a higher number of beneficiaries than the minimum eligible partnership requirement as set in the Cooperation Programme;
- width of the involved territories to ensure that greater Programme area population;
- benefits from the achieved results;
- higher financial allocations than those foreseen for standard projects;
- specific and targeted institutional and technical skills and know how to ensure;
- deeper/long-lasting impacts and benefits for the whole cooperation area.

Following an **institutional top-down approach** the Italy-Croatia Programme selected strategic themes, recognizing the needs of strategic cross-border relevance stemming from the Programme area and the strategic nature of the identified themes as well as the importance of giving a common and cross-border solution to the identified needs emerged. On the other side, **standard projects** are complex cooperation projects typically originating from the acknowledgement of a need or a potential and consequently testing a cross-border solution.

Considering the level of implementation of the 2014-2020 programming period and the need of assessing the impacts produced by the Italy-Croatia Programme during 2023, the **desk exercise** has been focused on the **intangible impacts of closed projects** (i.e. standard projects), covering both quantitative information and example of intangible impacts presented in the projects’ Final Reports.

It has to be stressed that while the desk analysis has been developed on a total of 39 standard projects’ Final Report, only 14 Final Reports out of 39 covered quantitative information.

The following Table shows the **key quantitative information** collected per each intangible impact enclosed in the Final Reports.

<i>Intangible impacts</i>	<i>Main quantitative information</i>
Raising awareness	177.335 People reached (Consumers, Students, people from research and academia etc.)
	1.493 Local PA, Schools, Regional development agencies, NGO and other stakeholders involved etc:
	58 Video
	36 Events
	More than 7600 Social Network Followers
	17 Centers adapted and/or established
Building Institutional Capacity	125 Stakeholders, policymakers etc reached: 125
	13 Focus groups/events
	18 Master Plan and local action plans
Influencing policies	16

	Municipalities and project partners involved
Changing attitudes and behaviors	522 People
	12 Centers involved

Evaluator's elaboration on 14 standard projects Final Reports

Regarding **raising awareness**, Italy-Croatia closed standard projects reached more than 177.000 people and involved more than 1400 stakeholders. This is a very important result considering the very nature of cooperation projects that aim to create sustainable networks and partnerships thanks to the involvement of stakeholders. Another key element is **building institutional capacity**; within this theme, closed standard projects reached 125 among policy makers, stakeholders etc., adapted or created 17 Centers and organized 13 Focus Groups/Events. **Influencing policies** is also a very interesting intangible impact; the outcomes in terms of master and local actions plans (18) as well as municipalities and project partners involved (16) are relevant, since influencing policies is an impact that seems to be closer to other typology of projects like strategic or cluster. With reference to **changing attitudes and behaviors** 522 people have been concerned.

In addition to quantitative information the Evaluator took into consideration the **examples of intangible impacts** reported by the standard projects in their Final Reports.



Raising Awareness

- Effective and innovative solutions and techniques (e.g. more sustainable)
- High level scientific and dissemination events (also at schools)
- Marketing campaign, socio-economic surveys, partner and stakeholder meeting, study visits



Leveraging synergies

- Synergies between projects
- Institutional synergies (es: municipalities and other local administrations)



Building Institutional Capacity

- Involvement of Ministries, Regional governments and local administrators and policy-makers
- Training sessions, capacity building meetings/events and best practice analysis
- New protocols
- New centres/observatories/hubs



Influencing policies

- Policy recommendation reports, public consultations, memorandum of understanding, etc
- Draft sector regulatory framework's documents and proposals (also at EU level)
- Action plans and strategies aiming at influencing policy

As presented by the Figure above from the Evaluator exercise is possible to select the most interesting and common **intangible impacts** that could represent “**food for thought**” also considering the new programming period as follows.

Raising Awareness

- Promotional campaigns: social media posts, press, institutional web sites, videos and informative materials to sensitize stakeholders, citizens and policy-makers.
- Public educational activities such as the distribution of educational publications to address various target groups.
- Effective and innovative solutions and techniques (e.g. more sustainable), high level scientific and dissemination events (also at schools), marketing campaign, socio-economic surveys, consumer analysis, target group, partner and stakeholder meeting, study visits.

Building Institutional Capacity

- Involvement of Ministries, Regional governments and local administrators and policy-makers.
- Training sessions (also cross-border training), capacity building meetings/events and best practice analysis.

- Knowledge of new technologies and elaboration of new protocols.
- Establishment of new centers/observatories/hubs.

Leveraging synergies

- Sector and Cross-sector/industry synergies.
- Synergies between several projects of the Interreg Italy-Croatia.
- Cross-border synergies (and in general synergies between Italy and Croatia in several fields: ports and hubs, research and universities, etc.).
- Institutional synergies (es: municipalities and other local administrations).

Influencing policies

- Policy recommendation reports, public consultations, memorandum of understanding, etc.
- Draft sector regulatory framework's documents and proposals (also at EU level).
- Action plans and strategies aiming at influencing policy.

Changing attitudes and behavior

- Change of traditional practices and introduction of not only new environment-friendly solutions and techniques (es. production of renewable energy), but also attitudes and behaviors.
- Highlight of correct and more sustainable behaviors and provision of new services to stimulate changes in attitudes of both authorities and general public.

In addition to desk analysis the Independent Evaluator organized a **Focus Group** on the **1st of March 2023** with the main objective of discussing the **different approaches** adopted by the Programme for the various calls it issued, i.e., **strategic and cluster projects**. The event was an occasion to better understand the role of evaluation, meet beneficiaries, sharing knowledge and experiences.

Focus Group as a valid participatory tool for evaluation exercise

Focus groups can provide information and insights about the perceptions, opinions, feelings, and attitudes of beneficiaries towards Programme's approaches and type of projects. The value of the information is that it allows Evaluator to collect primary data and beneficiaries' point of views.

Thanks to beneficiaries' participation and contribution, the Independent Evaluator has been able to gather useful information and insights that have been taken into account for the drafting of this Operational Evaluation Report.

The focus group was structured on the basis of **seven key themes** on each of which the beneficiaries were asked to express their opinion thanks to a participatory tool, **Menti tool**, where the beneficiaries were called to vote among a series of closed answers relating to each macro theme, both freely within the open discussion.

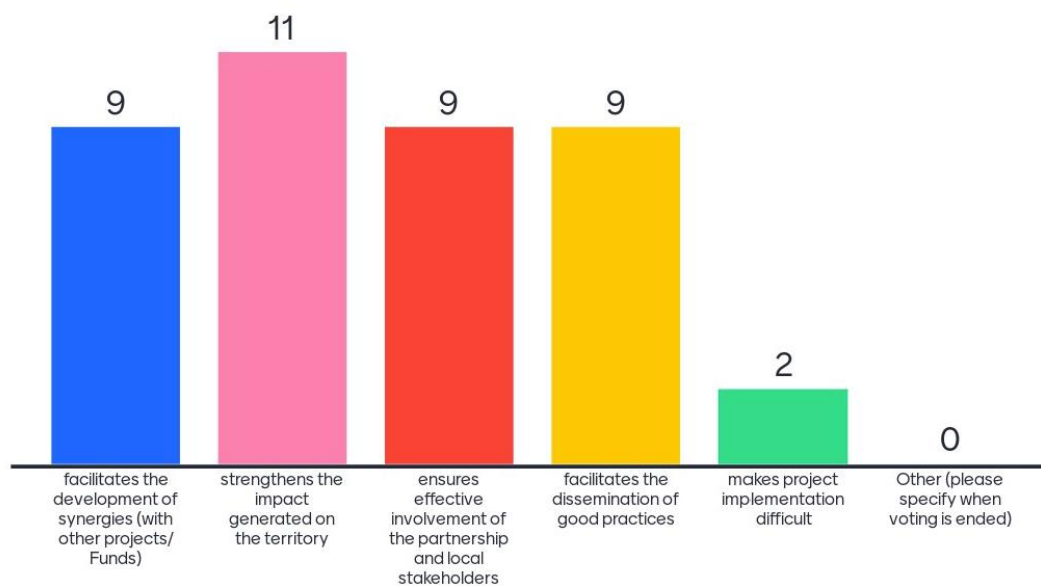


1. Being part of strategic project...
2. Sustainability
3. CBC added value
4. Capitalization
5. Stakeholders involvement
6. Multipliers of synergies
7. Obstacles to achieve project's results

The following charts cover the **main outcomes** stemming from the Focus Group participatory sharing, per macro-theme. At the end of the contribution, some general conclusions are reported thanks to the open discussion's results.

Being part of a strategic project...

In general terms strategic projects are “multilevel” projects implemented by partners able to influence or even better directly define policies. The actions foreseen must be inter-sectoral actions, strictly coherent and linked to each other and beyond this must converge towards a common objective of territorial development and justify a unitary implementation approach. Strategic projects shall be considered as the initial concrete element of a broader and longer process able to facilitate the agreement and design of future planning and activities in the tackled themes. The strategic projects should be implemented following a territorial, integrated, inclusive and participative approach.

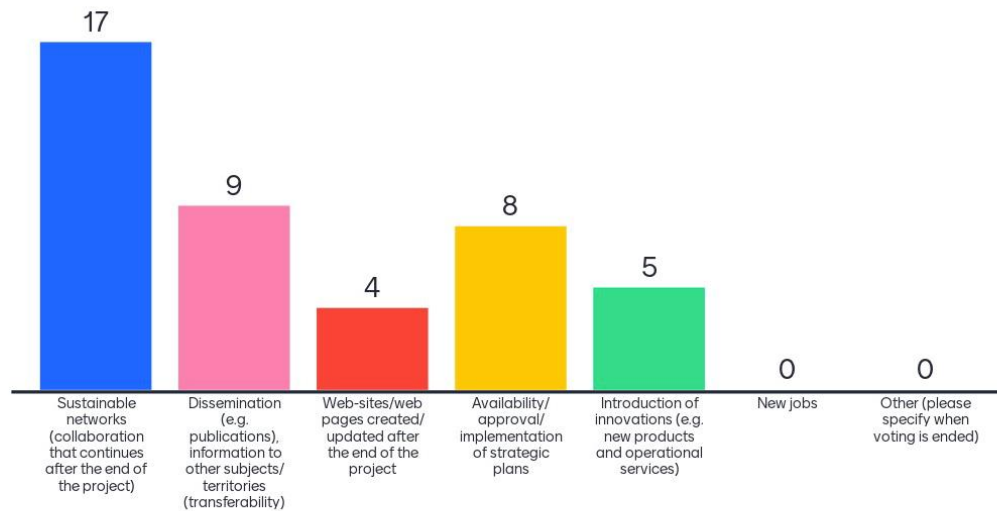


The beneficiaries identified “**the impact generated on the territory**” as the main added value of being part of strategic project. At the same time, the **development of synergies, effective involvement of partners and local stakeholders** as well as the dissemination of **good practices** are key factors and strengths of strategic projects. Notwithstanding, some beneficiaries highlighted some difficulties in strategic projects implementation as follows:

- Strategic projects are surely an opportunity. Nevertheless, **some difficulties of matching between technical and political layers** have been detected; it would be significant to find a balance between these two aspects in order to be in line with the timing of the project.
- Beneficiaries stressed the **presence of many implementation rules**; it is considered difficult to manage strategic projects: many partners, high budget, many difficult in terms of rules, lots of reports, coordination of partners.
- Regarding **impacts**, it has been highlighted the possibility of implementing **concrete pilot actions** thanks to the large budget of strategic projects. In addition, partners always continue to collaborate on the same topic after the end of the strategic project. This allows strategic projects’ sustainability after the project closure.
- Thanks to strategic projects IT tools have been implemented. It is very interesting to share **the IT tool where all good practices are collected**, useful for all the stakeholders, for new business and connections.

How is the long-term sustainability of the project ensured?

Another aspect analyzed during the Focus Group was the long-term sustainability of projects. This is a very challenging issue with reference to Interreg projects which have as their main goal the creation of partnerships and networks that last over time, even beyond the duration of the project.



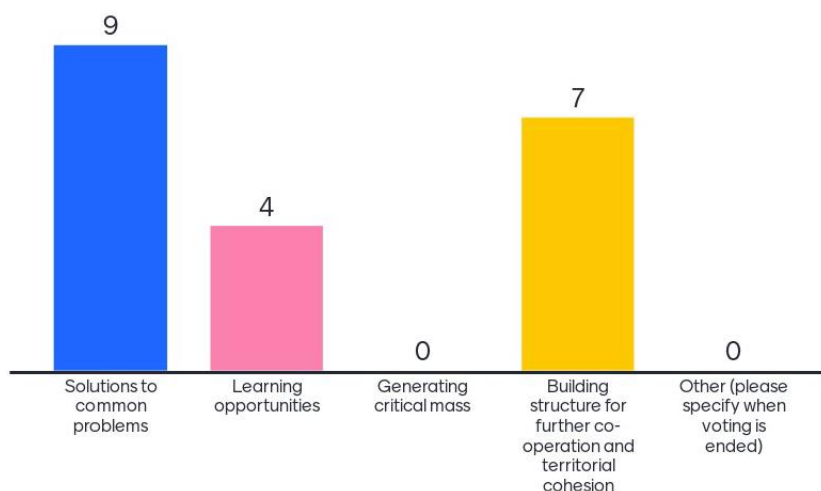
Actually, **sustainable partnerships** are indicated by most of the beneficiaries participating in the Focus Group as the main element through which the sustainability of the projects is guaranteed. Other elements are also able to ensuring the sustainability according to the majority of beneficiaries:

- Dissemination activities such as publications and information to other actors of the territory.
- Availability/approval/implementation of strategic plans.

With reference to introduction of innovations it is very interesting to highlight the experience of the creation of **Association/legal entity at cross border level** as an example of long-term cooperation and sustainability of the project.

What is the type of CBC added value produced by the project that has concretely contributed to cross-border development?

The potentials of CBC are not yet fully studied. However, the literature largely distinguishes political, institutional, economic, and social-cultural added values it brings. At project level it is of outermost importance for the evaluation exercise to capture the added value of actions at cross-border level in order to investigate the projects' influence and to identify the types of CBC added value able of giving their concrete contribution.

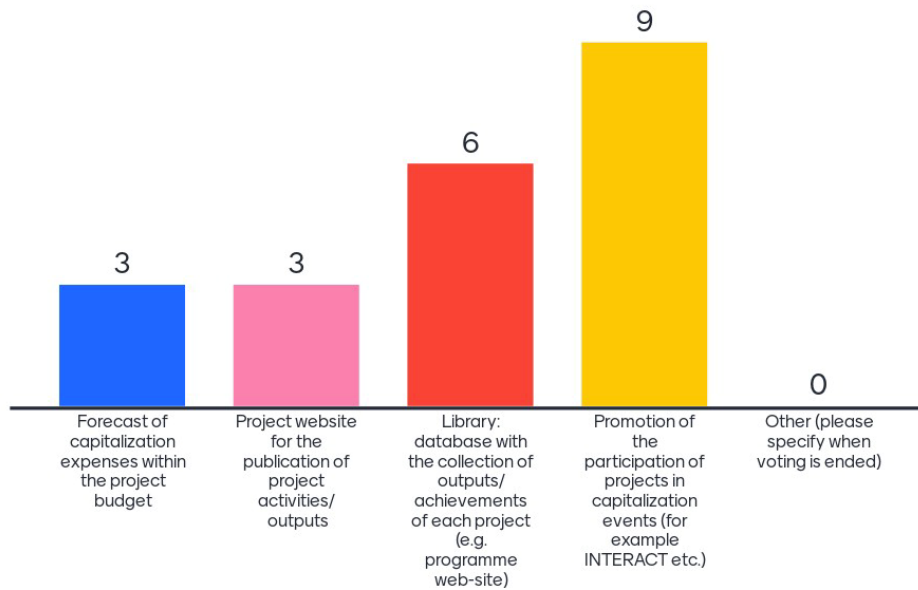


The results of the Focus Group demonstrate how, in the context of strategic projects, **solutions to common problems** and **building structure for further cooperation** are the elements that contribute most to obtaining CBC added value.

Learning opportunity is also indicated as one of the best aspects of working in a strategic project. Learning from the experience of other partners is essential for CBC strategic projects. To give an example, the implementation of a single IT portal for all partners and stakeholders is a valuable tool for sharing and capitalizing experiences and knowledge. In the platform, all the outputs of the pilot actions are shared with other partners and users, contributing to share knowledge and exchange practices.

Which tool is the most effective for project results' capitalization?

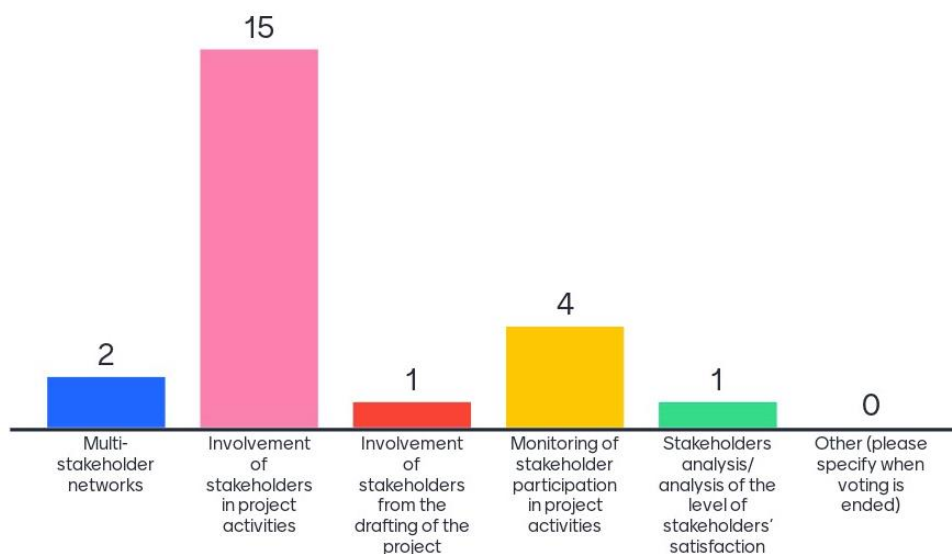
Capitalization in Interreg can be understood as an integrated building process that gathers valuable Programme and project results within a specific field of regional development policy. It enables sharing of knowledge and raising awareness among Interreg stakeholders about the achievements of Interreg in a particular field (capital). Furthermore, it supports the (re-)use and/or transfer of this capital, ultimately promoting improved performance and delivery. Capitalization efforts take place at different level; during the Focus Group the projects' results' capitalization have been analysed in order to detect the opinion of beneficiaries on the tools that are the most effective for projects' results capitalization.



From the beneficiaries' experience the **participation of projects in capitalization events**, such as INTERACT, as well as **database with the collection of outputs/achievements** of each project (i.e. programme web-site) are the most effective tools for achieving project results capitalization.

How is the involvement of local stakeholders addressed?

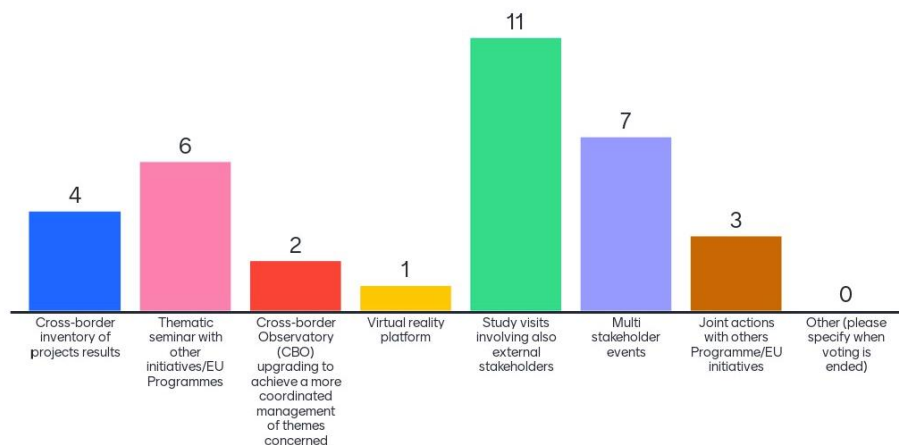
Another aspect analysed was the involvement of local stakeholders. It is increasingly apparent that for projects aiming to develop long-term sustainable management solutions stakeholder participation is required at the design, implementation and evaluation phases. And that is the case of strategic and cluster projects of Italy-Croatia Programme. Actually, stakeholder involvement is a key aspect of that projects' type. To give an example, at the pilot level, stakeholder involvement is critical both to ensure that the pilots are delivered as planned and that the results have sufficient influence on the future management of the topics concerned



Following the Focus Group’s main outcomes, the involvement of stakeholders is addressed mainly thanks to their **contribution to project activities and monitoring** them. Some difficulties have been detected for the involvement of local administrations.

What were the outputs produced by the project capable of producing added value of cooperation and valuable synergies among projects? i.e. “Multipliers of synergies”

An essential factor of the evaluation analysis is the identification of the "**multipliers of synergies**", the outputs of the projects concretely capable of activating added value and synergies among projects. This is a very challenging topic on which the opinions of the beneficiaries are various.



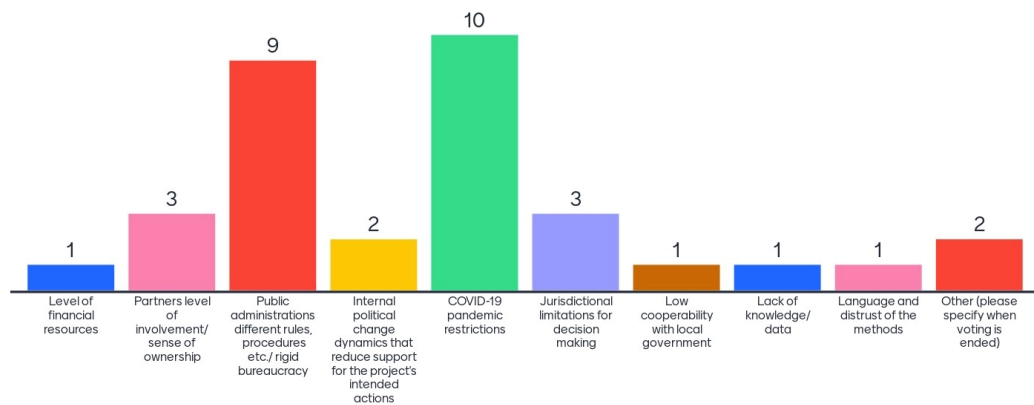
The following main “multipliers of synergies/added value” can be listed:

- **Study visits involving also external stakeholders.**
- **Multi-stakeholders’ events.**
- **Thematic seminars with other initiatives/EU Programmes.**

In line with the evaluation results, the events/seminars involving stakeholders at various levels and which produce **connections between actors** are able to create **synergy and added value of CBC cooperation**. In particular, the **study visit tool** is appreciated by Focus Group’s participants as activator of exchange of experience, sharing of knowledge and competencies, precious opportunity to gather ideas and capitalize projects’ results.

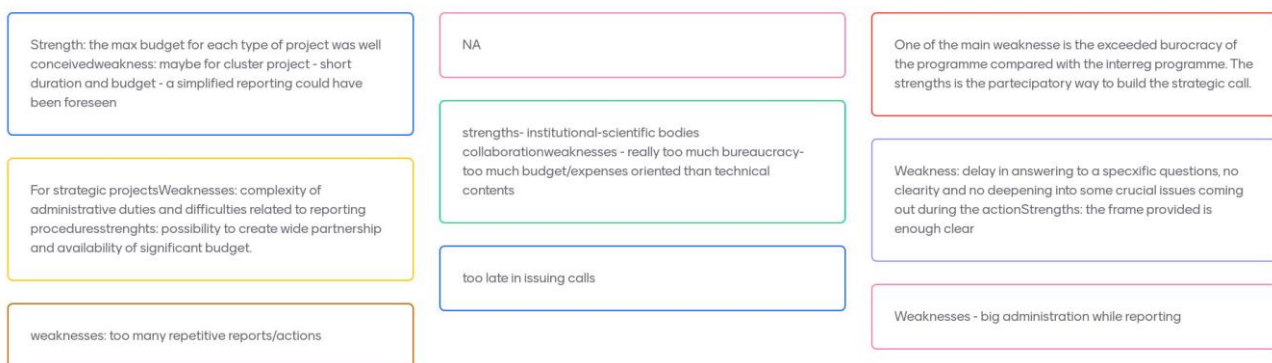
What were the main obstacles to achieve projects’ results?

In order to improve the management and implementation of projects also in a future perspective, it is of outermost importance to collect information and data on the critical issues encountered by the partners in order to share experiences and solutions.



As can be seen from the Chart, the responses of the beneficiaries collected during the Focus Group are very varied, a sign of the fact that the **difficulties** are based on the different contexts of the interventions. The **pandemic** has certainly been the main obstacle for project management, with particular reference to cooperation projects where meetings and face-to-face exchanges between partners have always been the heart of the activities. At the same time, the **rigid bureaucracy**, the **different administrative rules and procedures** are reported by the beneficiaries as **critical aspects for the projects**, which often affected the physical and financial progress of the project activities. Another area of improvement is identified in the partners level of involvement. It is clear that for cooperation projects', especially strategic and cluster, the **engagement of partners** as well as the sense of ownership are essential for the achievement of the project objectives and results.

In the final part of the Focus Group, an open session was held dedicated to collecting the opinions of the beneficiaries on the **main weaknesses and strengths of the approaches** used by the MA in the different kind of calls.



From the considerations of the beneficiaries several interesting hints emerge for the Italy-Croatia Programme in terms of **strengths and weaknesses**:

- The main **weaknesses** are the **complexity of administrative rules and the difficulties related to reporting**.
- The main **strengths** are the possibility of developing **wide partnership, significant budget, the frame provided by the MA/JTS, collaboration between institutional and scientific level of bodies**.

3 The use of financial savings: some insights for a comparative analysis

In the closing phase of each Structural Fund programming period the issue of the use of residual resources frequently emerges. This issue usually has to be approached taking into account two types of constraints, on the one hand, limited time, and on the other hand, the degree of reliability of information about the financial resources actually available.

This chapter introduces some elements emerging from the analyses of the practices adopted in the calls that have characterized the Structural Funds Programs and in particular the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programs. The objective is to provide a brief review of practices promoted during the 2014-20 programming period with the direct or indirect purpose of reducing Program financial savings and, consequently, contributing to the full utilization of the Program budget.

The analysis is focused not only on the final stages of a planning period, when the emphasis is on the use of residual resources, but also on management practices that can be adopted during a planning period in order to reduce savings in the management of financial resources or otherwise improve the ability to manage those savings.

The first section examines the two main types of calls for proposals that are usually implemented by managing authorities: closed-ended (with a fixed deadline and a focus on evaluation criteria) and open-ended (more focused on eligibility).

The second section summarizes the 2014-2020 ex-post evaluation of the adoption of simplified costs by the managing authorities of ETC programs, also in light of a strong expectation of their systematic deployment following the general regulations approved by the European Commission.

The issues addressed in both paragraphs allow additional insights for the third and final paragraph, in which a classification of the solutions adoptable by managing authorities in promoting targeted Calls and innovative tools complementary to the management of the Programs.

3.1 Type of procedure implemented: open-ended and closed-ended

A recent study³ contracted by the European Commission presents a review of the types of calls that have been implemented in the 2014-2020 programming period by a number of authorities responsible for managing the ERDF, ESF, and Cohesion Fund, including several ETC Programmes. In particular, the study provides a synthesis of the findings of an analysis of practices, procedures, and criteria used to select operations in a sample of 29 Operational Programmes and has identified challenges, good practices, and lessons. First, it is important to highlight how, regardless of the thematic objectives and participation requirements of the various calls, a key factor is the procedure itself activated in the call, which basically distinguishes the calls into: open ended and close ended.

The study first highlights the average duration of the selection process, in terms of calendar days, from the launch of the call to the signing of the last contract, for all types of calls. The longer duration of the open-ended competitive calls is related to the characteristics of this type of calls. Indeed, closed-ended calls are open for submission of applications for a limited pre-defined period of time; applications are evaluated all together after the submission deadline, and contracts are also signed all together after the evaluation is concluded.

Differently, open-ended competitive calls remain open for submission of application until the budget is fully utilized, while applications are evaluated and contracts are signed on a rolling basis. Open-ended competitive calls tend to focus mostly on eligibility criteria rather than quality and priority criteria, and hence they appear on average to be less complex than closed-ended competitive calls. This explains why, despite open-ended competitive calls having a higher duration of the selection process in terms of calendar days, they still have a lower duration in terms of FTE ("full-time equivalent") days compared to closed-ended competitive calls.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/publications/reports/2023/selection-of-operations-taking-stock-of-practices-in-the-eu-member-states_en

The following figures show the average duration in terms of FTE days of each stage of the selection process, from the drafting of the tender documents to the signing of the final contract, distinguishing between open and closed tenders. In both cases, the phase of evaluating and selecting the proposals is the most onerous in terms of FTE days, and on average accounts for almost half of the duration of the process; this is followed by the contract preparation and signing phase, about a quarter of the total time, and finally the phase of drafting the call documents (7 percent).

As is evident from the data, the situation in terms of duration changes substantially between the two types of procedures with regard to appraisal and selection of the proposals, with n. 107 days for open-ended and 220 days for closed-ended. This trend is also confirmed in the following phases (informing and contracting). Adding up the FTE days for appraisal, selection, informing and contracting, we obtain for open-ended a total of n. 204 days, while for closed-ended we get a total of n. 366 days. This is a valuable indication that should also be kept in mind when reading the subsequent criterion for identifying good practices proposed in the following paragraph.

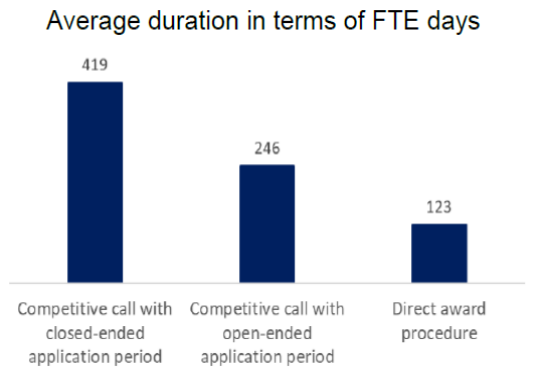


Figure 1: Average FTE days needed to carry out the selection process for competitive open-ended calls

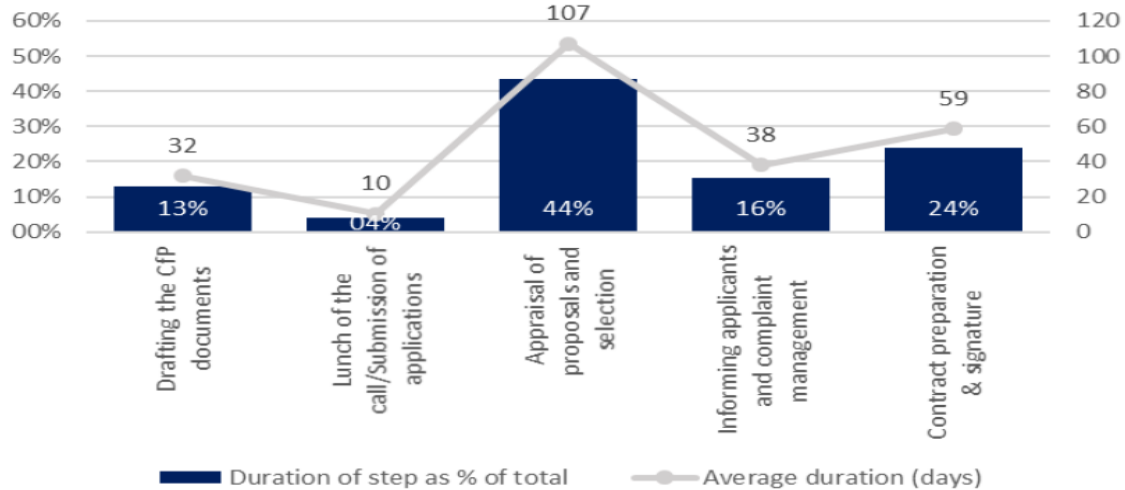
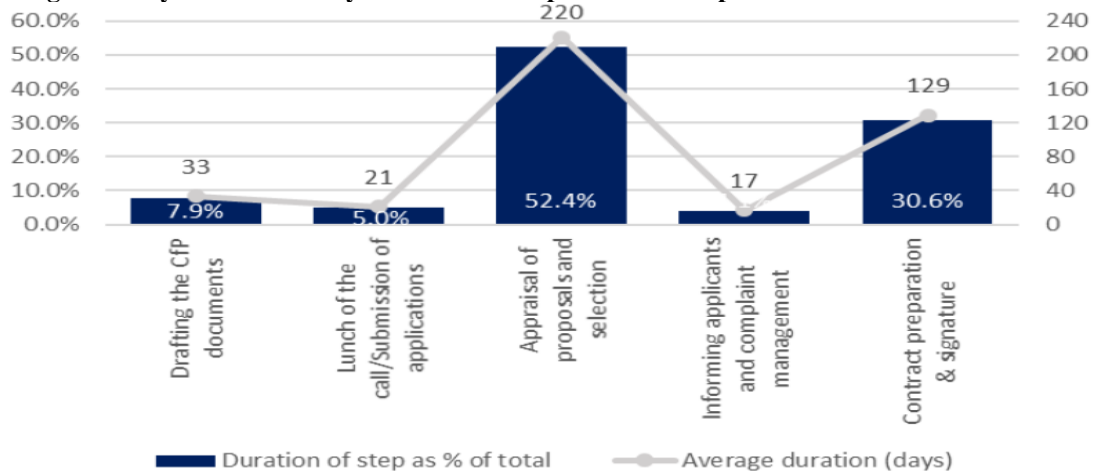


Figure 2: Average FTE days needed to carry out the selection process for competitive closed-ended calls



3.2 The simplified cost options after the “Omnibus proposal”

In 2018 an official report⁴ from the European Commission analysed the use and intended use of simplified cost options (SCOs) in several structural funds, including ETC programmes. On that date, SCOs were used by 73% of ERDF-CF (Cohesion Fund) Operational Programmes (67% of “mainstream” programmes and 90% of ETC programmes). The use of SCOs was varying strongly between Member States: “Mainstream” programmes in more developed regions and ETC programmes were using SCOs for a larger part of the budget (respectively 11% and 17%) compared to “less developed regions”.

Following the approval of the 'Omnibus proposal'⁵, in parallel with the start of the new 2021-2027 programming period, ETC programmes are already making significant use of simplified cost options.

The key reasons for using SCOs are:

- Reducing administrative burden,
- simplification of the compliance check and;
- reduction of administrative burden.

MAs who have not used SCOs during the 2014-2020 period, generally consider them unsuitable for their programmes or justify their choice with concerns over risks of systemic impact from miscalculation and the work needed to design the SCOs system. The greater use in more developed regions highlighted the need to increase administrative capacity in some authorities, considering that the administrative capacity may be limiting or slowing the uptake of SCOs. Key reasons limiting the use of SCOs in terms of budget coverage during 2014-2020 period are:

- SCOs are not always mandatory for all project beneficiaries (i.e., 69% of ERDF-CF OPs using SCOs make these mandatory for all project beneficiaries; for ETC programmes this is 54%). Therefore, SCOs are often proposed as an option and beneficiaries can decide to use them or not.
- The “weight” of fully publicly procured operations. In several cases (e.g., BG, ES, GR, HR; LU) the amount of fully publicly procured operations is particularly high and thus limits the possibility of using SCOs.
- Flat rate financing is used extensively but unlike Standard scales of unit costs (SSUC) and lump sums, this cannot cover the whole budget of the operations.

SCOs are frequently used in projects/programmes to support research and development, business development and in technical assistance projects (for both ETC and “mainstream” programmes). Their main use in both ETC and “mainstream” programmes is to cover personnel costs. SCOs are used in projects involving all types of beneficiaries. Almost 90% of projects using SCOs involve public administration and other state organisations such as universities and research centres. Enterprises and NGOs also benefit with more than 75% of projects using SCOs involving non-public actors.

Under the Omnibus proposal, the applicable SCOs are:

- Flat rate financing
- Standard scales of unit costs (SSUC)
- Lump sums

According to the already mentioned 2018 report, during the 2014-2020 period the Member States mainly had the intention to use flat rate financing (98% of ERDF-CF OPs implementing SCOs) while only 30% use SSUC and 19% lump sums. Flat rates were largely used by both “mainstream” and ETC programmes (98% in both cases). The intention to use SSUC was higher in “mainstream” programmes (37% of MAs using SCOs against 13% for ETC). Lump sums were instead used more by ETC programmes (45% of MAs using SCOs, against 8% for “mainstream” programmes).

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/use_sco_esif_en.pdf

⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC0527\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC0527(02))

Recently, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Development made available specific data⁶ on the use of SCOs by European territorial cooperation programmes in the period 2014-2020. The analysed data allowed us to map even more precisely the various options implemented by the various Operational Programmes, as shown below. Compared to the previous European Commission study, the consolidated data show that there has been an acceleration in the actual use of the lump sum option, with 33 out of 68 programmes (49%) having actually implemented it at least once.

Row Labels	Mandatory	Optional	Total
Flat rate for indirect costs up to 15 % of direct staff costs, Article 68 (b) CPR (OTS)	37	26	66
Flat rate for direct costs based on existing methods and corresponding rates for a similar type of operation and beneficiary, Article 68(c) CPR	1	1	2
Flat rate for direct staff costs up to 20% of direct costs other than staff costs, Article 68a (1) CPR (OTS)	5	33	39
Flat rate for direct staff costs up to 20% of direct staff costs other than staff costs, Article 68a (1) CPR (OTS)		2	2
Flat rate for indirect costs up to 25% of direct costs, Article 68(a) CPR		2	3
Flat rate of up to 40% of direct staff costs to cover the remaining eligible costs, Article 68b(1) (OTS)	2	6	9
Hourly rate determined by dividing annual gross employment costs by 1720 hours or corresponding pro-rata, Article 68a (2) CPR (OTS)	3	14	18
Lump sums, Article 67 (1)(c) CPR	19	19	45
Standard scale of unit costs, Article 67 (1)(b) CPR	13	8	21
Total	80	111	191

3.3 Types of procedures and programming objectives

The programming of European territorial cooperation actions includes both mainstream calls, which are geared toward managing the main objectives and allocating the major part of the financial resources, and complementary calls, whose general objectives can be summarized as follows:

1. Contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results.
2. Contribute to the capitalization of good practices of projects already funded in previous calls.
3. Consolidate the impacts and effects of projects already funded in previous calls.

The following paragraphs will present some examples of these types, which can also complement each other within strategic Programs and over time.

3.3.1 Closed, targeted and/or restricted calls

The first type of complementary calls is identified with those that place substantial restrictions on the broader objectives and targets defined by the Program. The underlying rationale concerns the need to fill the gaps in the current programming or to improve the achievement of certain Program results. Another objective is to complement actions already funded under previous calls. The most striking consequence of this approach is the limitation of eligible beneficiaries, which are typically identified from among those most consistent with the specific pre-selected objectives. In some cases, this leads to the actual definition of eligible legal entities.

Specific targets are selected in relation to their status; the Calls we have selected are geared toward one or a few SOs that have not yet met their targets.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/improving-investment/simplified-cost-options/practices-interact.xlsx

When the beneficiaries are also defined by the Call, the selection process focuses on eligibility requirements; when no restrictions are placed on the beneficiaries, however, the selection process focuses more on quality criteria, such as the project's ability to achieve the targets set by the Call.

	<i>IPA CBC Greece - North Macedonia 2014-2020 (2nd Call for project proposals - Targeted & Restricted. Deadline by 29th May 2020)</i>	<i>IPA CBC Greece-Albania 2014-2020. (5th Targeted Call for Project Proposals. Deadline by 24th January 2020)</i>	<i>Interreg Italia-Slovenia 2014-2020. (Targeted call for standard project proposals. Deadline by 15th March 2019)</i>
Contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of S.O.s • Restricted list of beneficiaries • Focus on eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one S.O. • Restricted list of beneficiaries • Focus on eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of S.O.s • No restriction to beneficiaries • Focus on quality

- *IPA CBC Greece - North Macedonia 2014-2020 (2nd Call for project proposals - Targeted & Restricted⁷. Deadline by 29th May 2020)*

This is a clear example of a call in which the proposal must be presented only on a selection of specific objectives (employment, tourism, mitigation of natural disasters) and the partnerships can be formulated only by the beneficiaries indicated for each specific objective. The list of beneficiaries is therefore exhaustive and constitutes a reduced set compared to the general eligibility of the Program.

	S.O.1.1: Create employment opportunities for graduates in the cross-border area, with use of innovative tools	S.O.1.3.: Improve the attractiveness and promote tourism in the cross-border area to enhance employment	S.O.2.4.: Prevention, mitigation and management of natural disasters, risks and hazards
National and Regional Authorities	X	X	X
Regional development Agencies (North Macedonia)	X	X	X
Universities, knowledge/research institutes	X		X
Business support organisations	X	X	
Civil Society Bodies	X	X	X
Local Authorities (Municipalities and its Companies)		X	
Civil Protection Authorities			X

- *IPA CBC Greece-Albania 2014-2020. (5th Targeted Call for Project Proposals⁸. Deadline by 24th January 2020)*

This call was aimed exclusively at projects related to Priority Axis 1, Specific Objective 1.4 *Improve effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires*. Beneficiaries of the targeted Call are:

- Headquarters of the Hellenic Fire Corps
- Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania

⁷ [http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/call-for-proposals/2_2nd-Call-for-Project-Proposals-\(Targeted---Restricted\)](http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/call-for-proposals/2_2nd-Call-for-Project-Proposals-(Targeted---Restricted))

⁸ <https://greece-albania.eu/calls/5th-targeted-call-for-project-proposals>

- Ministry of Defense (General Department of Civil Emergencies)
- Municipality of Berat

In this case, the potential beneficiaries constitute not only a narrower list, but a closed and defined list of relevant public entities with respect to the objective of the call. Within the single funded project, an output and a result indicator are expected to be achieved. Specifically, the output indicator "Area damaged by forest fires (5-year rolling annual average)" is expected to decrease from 15,010.89 to 13,450.00 hectares, and the output indicator "Population benefiting from forest fire protection measures" is expected to reach the target value of 115,000 inhabitants.

The Hellenic Fire Service Command, the Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and the Albanian Ministry of Defense (General Department of Civil Emergencies) are the national authorities responsible for improving the effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management, with a focus on forest fires. The Municipality of Berat will participate in the partnership to implement pilot activities in the Albanian Program area.

- *Interreg Italia-Slovenia 2014-2020. (Targeted call for standard project proposals⁹. Deadline by 15th March 2019)*

The Program has three types of projects, and this call is the last one dedicated to funding standard projects. This call for proposals is "targeted" in the sense that it addresses only a few specific objectives of the Program. In fact, based on an analysis carried out on ongoing projects, it focuses only on output indicators whose target values will not be achieved by projects being implemented under previous calls. In this case, there are no particular restrictions with respect to the type of beneficiaries, but rather there is a focus on the ability of project proposals to contribute to specific Program objectives. This focus is thus emphasized as a priority element in the evaluation criteria.

Specific objective of the Programme	ID	Output indicator	Target value 2023 of the Programme
<i>1b</i>	CO26	Number of companies cooperating with research institutions (Common indicator)	38
<i>6d</i>	CO23	Surface area of habitats co-financed for improved conservation status	6.000
	3.2.2	Cross-border pilot actions in support of biodiversity	48
	3.2.3	Participants in educational and dissemination events	8.500
<i>6f</i>	3.3.1	Number of innovative green technologies tested and implemented	13
	3.3.2	Number of companies implementing new and innovative green solutions	7
<i>11 CTE</i>	4.1.1	Cross-border Protocols and Agreements signed Joint solutions that increase integration, coherence, harmonisation of governance	10
	4.1.2	Programme area (shared policies, legislative framework or regulations, joint strategic documents, e-government tools, etc.)	11

3.3.2 Capitalisation calls

Capitalisation calls are a now standard instrument aimed at strengthening the effects of projects already funded in previous calls. The main difference between the various Programs lies in the difference in eligibility of the capitalisation object itself. The most restricted case obviously concerns the possibility of capitalising only projects resulting from the Program itself. At the opposite extreme are calls where the eligibility parameters are

⁹ <https://www.ita-slo.eu/en/calls/targeted-call-standard-projects-no-72019>

unrestricted, leaving it to the evaluation phase to judge the relevance of the projects to the Program's objectives. Some examples, however, seek intermediate solutions, collaborating with other Programs in the identification of projects and Programs that allow the identification of shared objectives capable of triggering virtuous contaminations in terms of impact and dissemination of good practices.

	<i>Interreg MED 2014-2020. (4th call for modular projects – restricted for transfer and mainstream projects. Deadline by 15th December 2020)</i>	<i>ENI CBC Med 2014-2020. (Call for capitalisation. Deadline by 28th July 2020)</i>
Contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restricted list of projects/beneficiaries ● Focus on transferring and mainstreaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No restriction to beneficiaries ● Focus on geographical eligibility and topics ● Open to projects from other Programmes

- **Interreg MED 2014-2020. (4th call for modular projects – restricted for transfer and mainstream projects)¹⁰. Deadline by 15th December 2020)**

This call was targeted to the Program priority Axis 2, S.O.2.1. Energy efficiency in buildings and S.O.2.2. Renewable Energy and restricted to the transfer or mainstreaming of shortlisted outputs of finalised Interreg MED projects.

The objective of the restricted call was to build upon concrete 2014-2020 Interreg MED projects' achievements and further capitalise on completed projects' outputs, bridging with the next programming period requirements, in line with the new EU growth strategy: the European Green Deal. The call explicitly focused on "capitalisation", entailing a very precise content, composed of 'transfer' and 'mainstreaming':

- **Transferring** project focusing on effective transfer of developed tools/methodologies. This type of projects must underpin a "transfer process" of a technical tool or methodology from one organisation to another with the aim to improve day-to-day practices and/or facilitating processes undertaken mainly at technical, operational and/or administrative level. Partners that participated to the completed project and developed the selected output (tool/methodology) will act as "givers" towards "receivers" partners in different MED territories. A specific type of transferring projects targeted to IPA territories, focusing on effective transferring of developed tools/methodologies was also foreseen. The main difference of those projects would be that the "receivers" of those projects would be exclusively partners from IPA territories.
- **Mainstreaming** project focusing on mainstreaming activities of achieved results into local, regional and/or national policies. This type of projects must underpin a "mainstreaming process" of a technical tool or methodology from one organisation into a public institution (competent service) actively involved in drafting and implementing public policies, with the aim to improve them. Partners that participated to the completed project shall contribute to integrate and apply the selected output(s) into the corresponding local, regional and/or national policy in the same or in new MED territories, including IPA countries.

For both types of projects, the starting point should be a concrete and finalised deliverable/output of a 2014-2020 Interreg MED completed project previously identified by the Program in the framework of the current call. This deliverable/output, selected for the transferring or mainstreaming process, should be a fully operational and functional tool/methodology, which can support decision-making and policy related mechanisms to facilitate territorial uptake and ownership. Relevance of the finalised deliverable/output with territorial needs is key, for triggering a transfer process or a territorial policy change (mainstreaming). The choice of the deliverable/output to be transferred or capitalised is therefore essential to secure success and smooth project delivery considering the limited timeframe (end of the 2014-2020 programming period).

¹⁰https://interreg-med.eu/index.php?id=696&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=8721&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=0a87d2ccf475c3f48949b28f4d1c26a4

- **ENI CBC Med 2014-2020.** (Call for capitalisation¹¹. Deadline by 28th July 2020)

For this last call under the 2014-2020 period, the Program has decided to focus on capitalisation. The objective of the call for capitalisation projects was to foster the transfer, exploitation and mainstreaming of knowledge and results developed under different Euro-Mediterranean initiatives. This includes the ENPI/ENI CBC Med Programs, the Union for the Mediterranean and the Interreg MED Programme. This innovative process aims at enabling the uptake of the results of a series of different projects/Programs/initiatives by identifying successful and efficient practices, ensuring their promotion, dissemination, replication and mainstreaming in public policies.

Considering the context marked by COVID-19 pandemic and in view of the global economic downturn, applicants were encouraged to develop actions that could foster the socio-economic regeneration across the Mediterranean area, in terms of:

- Job and business creation;
- Transition to carbon-neutral economies;
- Efficient delivery of social care services;
- Support to the most vulnerable people.

To maximise the impact of the projects to be funded, all 4 thematic objectives and 11 priorities of the Program were addressed by the call. In order to broaden the scope of the call, Applicants were also invited to consider the results, knowledge and experiences developed by other Programs and initiatives, including Interreg Programs with a Mediterranean coverage, WestMED and BlueMed, PRIMA, regional and bilateral cooperation under the European Neighbourhood Instrument, etc.

3.3.3 Calls and other financial instruments aiming at consolidating impacts and effects of projects already funded in previous calls

At the end of the programming period, some Interreg Programs developed innovative instruments to enable the expansion of activities already financed under previous projects. Often the mechanism that led to the elaboration of such instrument stems from the long wave of lockdown effects imposed by Covid-19, and the need to consolidate project effects in the light of the numerous restrictions and re-programming that took place.

	<i>Interreg Europe 2014-2020. (Restricted call for additional activities - fifth call. Deadline 2 July 2021)</i>	<i>Interreg Maritime 2014-2020. (Mechanism for financing coherent expenditure supplementary to the activities of already funded projects. Open-ended call till 01/09/2023)</i>
Contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restricted list of projects/beneficiaries ● Focus on specific activities (Covid-19 remedial measures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restricted list of projects/beneficiaries ● Focus on eligibility of expenditures ● Open-ended

- **Interreg Europe 2014-2020.** (Restricted call for additional activities - fifth call¹². Deadline 2 July 2021)

In 2020 the Interreg Europe monitoring committee decided to launch a call for additional activities in order to further help approved projects to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. This exceptional measure offered the possibility for already approved projects:

- to further exchange experiences on the way the crisis impacts the issue they address and on possible measures to face and recover from the crisis,
- to further improve their regional development policies to better face and recover from this unprecedented situation.

The aim of the Managing Authority was also to address the risk of underspending at the Program level. The call was therefore restricted to the 258 already approved Interreg Europe projects. The opportunity was of particular

¹¹ https://www.enicbcmed.eu/eni-cbc-med-programme-launches-new-call-proposals-eu11-million-finance-capitalisation-projects?fbclid=IwAR1_pYYc3NJMuHdJD0HVe-AFBSKCKgMMkv52C0Vzifq6bt9CbBwNwAAfIRU

¹² <https://www.interregeurope.eu/news-and-events/news/the-fifth-call-in-figures>

interest to the 1st and 2nd call projects, because when the crisis started in March 2020, all 1st and 2nd call projects had already closed their phase 1. Therefore, they could not benefit from the first COVID-19 measures taken in 2020 for their exchange of experience process. At the beginning of 2021, these projects were either closed or under finalisation and they were expected to have made full use of their budget. They had neither the time nor the budget to carry out additional measures to face the COVID-19 crisis and this call was thus their only possibility to continue cooperating. In comparison, 3rd and 4th call projects were still running for several months/ years and their level of underspending could be high due to the crisis. With the measures taken in 2020, these projects could already propose additional activities to be financed through their unspent budget. At the end of the evaluation process, a total of n. 78 projects were approved.

- **Interreg Maritime 2014-2020.** (*Mechanism for financing coherent expenditure supplementary to the activities of already funded projects*¹³. *Open-ended call till 01/09/2023*)

At the end of the programming period, the Interreg Maritime Program established the mechanism for financing coherent expenditure supplementary to the activities of projects financed by the Program, whether closed or under implementation. The purpose of this mechanism is to finance additional project activities/investments to the initial project as long as they are consistent with the operational plan of the approved project and are able to further strengthen the objectives and results expected or already achieved by that project.

The expenses to be financed may have already been incurred or be incurred. Considering the residual time available for the current programming, the criteria for evaluating the expenses submitted provide for a higher score for expenses already incurred, without however excluding those to be incurred.

The submission of the application is to all intents and purposes an application to amend the approved project. To this end, the partnership shall complete the forms already available to the Program as supplemented by an annex specifically created for the drafting of this variation.

The application for the financing of consistent expenses is not an obligation for the Managing Authority. The ERDF funds available for the additional financing of projects will derive, in fact from the use of savings generated by closed and/or closing projects and/or from cuts to non-performing projects and will be allocated at the time of the project's closure.

¹³ https://interreg-maritime.eu/documents/197474/11303438/20230201_Com_CF_I_Avviso.pdf/7dd048c3-cd5c-7b2f-eb39-b5707dd7e520?t=1675259942952

3 Final considerations and recommendations

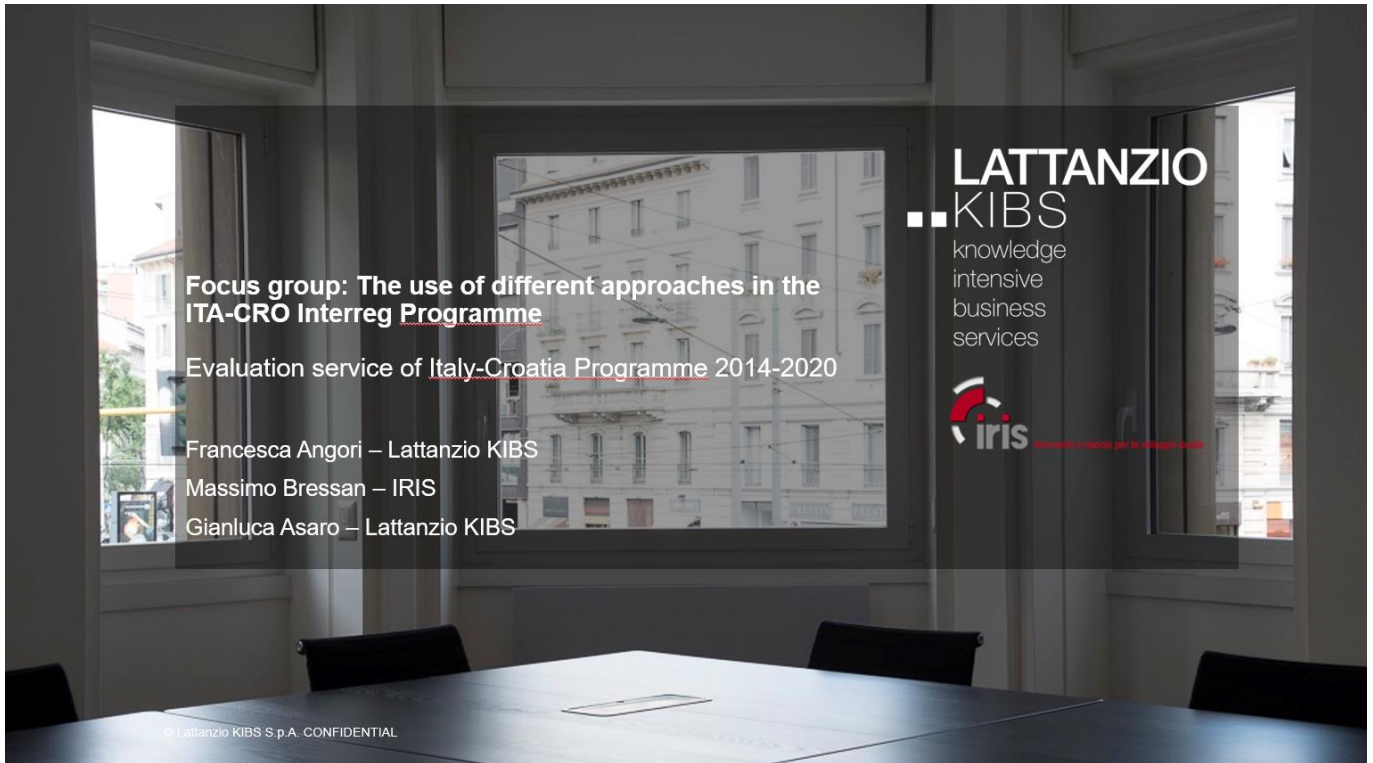
Theme	Conclusion	Recommendation
The use of different approaches in the ITA-HR Interreg programme – Chapter 2	Alongside some weaknesses such as for example the administrative burden, the participatory evaluation method showed the effective contribution of 2014-2020 strategic projects to the achievement of CBC main goals, following the projects' beneficiaries' direct experiences.	Considering the evaluation's outcome it should be stressed the added value of co-financing Operations of Strategic Importance (OSI projects) in terms of developing wide partnership, significant budget and extensive collaboration between institutional and scientific level of bodies.
	Study visits, events, seminars represent output "multipliers of synergies" among partners/actors able of creating CBC added value at project level.	It would be interesting to explore the study visit tool also through case studies to be disseminated on the Programme website as good practices
	IT platforms are a valid tool and a concrete learning opportunity for stakeholders and partners.	It would be interesting to explore IT platforms as a key element also through case studies to be disseminated on the Programme website as good practices
	Organizing a single event in which to bring together different projects owned by the same partner is a precious chance for capitalization and creation of critical mass on the topic concerned.	The Programme could promote these "cross-projects' events" especially with a view to capitalizing the results of projects/Programme and embedding cooperation, following the Regulatory provisions 2021-2027.
	Full commitment of all beneficiaries, their concrete involvement in the project actions is a key element. Actually, partnerships put together artificially do not necessarily function efficiently and effectively.	Avoiding partnerships created artificially; identifying of operations that are strategic for all project partners in order to implement their sense of ownership. This is facilitated in the new programming thanks to the implementation of small-scale projects.
	Key stakeholders' involvement is strategic for the impact on the territory which is the main added value of strategic projects.	Involvement of stakeholders since the very beginning of the project. Best practices/experiences of effective stakeholders' involvement can be spread. For example, the involvement of stakeholders in the projects' activities (e.g. data collection, pilot cations etc.) not only in the events/seminars/workshops.
	In the 2014-2020 programming period some difficulties in involving local partners have been reported by some beneficiaries of strategic projects.	The small-scale projects envisage "local authorities" as eligible applications. Their participation in IT-HR Programme can be encouraged for example during the call for proposals' info-days or in the assessment grid.

	<p>Difficulties in harmonizing different legislation, complexity of administrative rules, reporting has to be simplified.</p>	<p>Harmonizing reporting among different type of projects and simplifying the reporting grid. This simplification work has already been started in the 2014-2020 programming period.</p>
	<p>The analysis of the intangible impacts of the standard projects demonstrates the capability of this type of project to also contribute to the achievement of some "strategic goals" such as for example institutional synergies and implementation of actions plans aimed at influencing policies.</p>	<p>It could be interesting, as part of the evaluation process for standard projects, to provide evaluation criteria that reward projects that demonstrate a concrete "strategic impact", considering that in the indicative plan of calls of proposals 2021-2027 only one call is foreseen for OSIs and three are envisaged for standard projects.</p>
	<p>Regarding standard projects' intangible impacts of closed projects have been collected by the Evaluator (see Chapter 2) within the Operational Evaluation 2023.</p>	<p>It has to be stressed the difficulty of collecting quantitative information from the Final Report of standard projects. As a consequence, it is recommended to ask the projects to reflect on the impacts achieved also in the progress reports (i.e. a monitoring of the impacts over time) and not only in the final report in order to collect available quantitative data on the impacts of the projects.</p>
<p>The use of financial savings: some insights for a comparative analysis – Chapter 3 The use of financial savings: some insights for a comparative analysis</p>	<p>In the closing phase of each Structural Fund programming period the issue of the use of residual resources frequently emerges.</p>	<p>Several management practices can be adopted during a planning period in order to reduce savings in the management of financial resources or otherwise improve the ability to manage those savings.</p>
	<p>The problem of residual resources usually clashes with the constraint of the limited time available to take appropriate countermeasures.</p>	<p>Open-ended procedures (more focused on eligibility than on evaluation criteria) should be considered instead of closed-ended ones</p>
	<p>The problem of residual resources usually clashes with the constraint of the degree of reliability of information about the financial resources actually available.</p>	<p>The simplified cost options should be carefully analysed and specific solutions should be proposed according to the types of calls, the objectives pursued and the eligible cost categories.</p>
	<p>Alongside mainstream calls, complementary calls, to be configured according to the specific objectives to be pursued, can also be an important added value.</p>	<p>The identification of appropriate complementary calls should start from the identification of one of the following general objectives to be pursued:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results. 2. Contribute to the capitalization of good practices of projects already funded in previous calls. 3. Consolidate the impacts and effects of projects already funded in previous calls.

	<p>Adopting complementary calls can contribute to the strengthening of specific objectives or results which mainstream calls fail to sufficiently ensure.</p>	<p>Programme indicators should be constantly monitored in order to focus complementary calls on the most challenging indicators. Any restriction in the eligibility of participants should be a consequence of this, and not the main objective.</p>
	<p>Capitalisation calls can add value to the programme's objectives, including the possible eligibility of projects not funded by the programme itself.</p>	<p>Constant networking with other complementary and geographically compatible programmes should be ensured to evaluate virtuous mechanisms of contamination in capitalisation calls.</p>
	<p>Covid-19 showed us how important it is for programmes to take timely countermeasures in order to support projects in overcoming difficulties and to propose effective solutions for other projects as well.</p>	<p>Right from the planning phase of the mainstream calls, the publication of subsequent consolidation calls for the most virtuous projects should be envisaged, also considering the possibility of unforeseeable system events.</p>

4 Annexes

Annex 1: Slides presented during the Focus Group



Focus Group's main goal and contents

The main goal is to discuss the different approaches adopted by the Programme for the various calls. The event is an occasion for you to better understand the role of evaluation and to meet other beneficiaries.

Thanks to your participation and your contribution, the Independent Evaluator will be able to gather useful information and insights that will be taken into account for the drafting of the 2023 Operational Evaluation.

Main contents

- ▶ Presentation by the Independent Evaluator
- ▶ Data gathering through the use of a participative tool (Menti)
- ▶ Open discussion and inputs from the participants
- ▶ Summing up and final remarks

Evaluator's desk analysis: standard projects' main impacts



Evaluation activity: desk analysis preparation for the Focus Group

- The main goal was to detect the closed projects' (i.e. standard projects) main intangible impacts (examples and quantitative information)
- Desk analysis on 39 standard projects' Final Report
- Only 14 Final Reports out of 39 covered quantitative information

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Intangible impacts: standard projects' quantitative information



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Intangible impacts: key examples from standard projects



Raising Awareness

- Effective and innovative solutions and techniques (e.g. more sustainable)
- High level scientific and dissemination events (also at schools)
- Marketing campaign, socio-economic surveys, partner and stakeholder meeting, study visits



Leveraging synergies

- Synergies between projects
- Institutional synergies (es: municipalities and other local administrations)



Building Institutional Capacity

- Involvement of Ministries, Regional governments and local administrators and policy-makers
- Training sessions, capacity building meetings/events and best practice analysis
- New protocols
- New centres/observatories/hubs



Influencing policies

- Policy recommendation reports, public consultations, memorandum of understanding, etc
- Draft sector regulatory framework's documents and proposals (also at EU level)
- Action plans and strategies aiming at influencing policy

Data gathering through the use of a participatory tool and open discussion

- Go to **menti.com**
- Insert the following code: **22804390**
- Provide answers to see instant results
- Are there any other comments or inputs you would like to provide?



Annex 2: Questionnaire used during the Focus Group (through *mentimeter*)

1. **Being part of a strategic project...**

- facilitates the development of synergies (with other projects/Funds)
- strengthens the impact generated on the territory
- Ensures effective involvement of the partnership and local stakeholders
- Facilitates the dissemination of good practices
- Makes difficult project implementation
- Other (specify)

2. **How is the long-term sustainability of the project ensured?**

- Sustainable network (collaboration that continues after the end of the project)
- Dissemination (e.g., publications), information to other subjects/territories (transferability)
- Web-sites/web pages created/updated after the end of the project
- Availability/approval/implementation of strategic plans
- Introduction of innovations (e.g., new products and operational services)
- New jobs
- Other (please specify)

3. **What is the type of CBC added value produced by the project that has concretely contributed to cross-border development?**

- solutions to common problems;
- learning opportunities,
- generating critical mass,
- building structure for further co-operation and territorial cohesion.
- Other (specify)

4. **Which tool is the most effective for project results' capitalization?**

- Forecast of capitalization expenses within the project budget
- project website for the publication of project activities/ outputs
- library: database with the collection of outputs/achievements of each project (e.g. programme we-site)
- promotion of the participation of projects in capitalization events (for example INTERACT etc.)
- Other (specify)

5. **How is the involvement of local stakeholders addressed?**

- multi-stakeholder networks
- Involvement of stakeholders in project activities
- Involvement of stakeholders from the drafting of the project
- Monitoring of stakeholder participation in project activities
- Stakeholders' analysis/analysis of the level of stakeholders' satisfaction
- Other (specify)

6. What were the outputs produced by the project capable of producing added value of cooperation and valuable synergies between projects? i.e., “Multipliers of synergies”

- Cross-border inventory of projects results.
- Thematic seminar with other initiatives/EU Programmes.
- Cross-border Observatory (CBO) upgrading to achieve a more coordinated management of themes concerned.
- Virtual reality platform.
- Study visits involving also external stakeholders.
- Multi stakeholder events.
- Joint actions with others Programme/EU initiatives.
- Other (Specify)

7. What were the hinders to achieve projects’ results?

- Level of financial resources
- Partners level of involvement/sense of ownership
- public administrations different rules, procedures etc./ rigid bureaucracy
- internal political change dynamics that reduce support for the project's intended actions
- COVID-19 pandemic restrictions
- jurisdictional limitations for decision making
- low cooperability with local government
- lack of knowledge/data
- low level of commitment by governments and civil society
- language and distrust of the methods
- Other (specify)