



How to ensure a successful Phase 2?

Guidance note¹

Version 1 (12 April 2019)

Context

Interreg Europe is a capacity building programme whose core objective is to improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes. It supports exchange of experience among regional development practitioners and policy makers who can better implement their policies thanks to the inspiration gained from the cooperation. Within the projects, this support is organised in two phases:

- Phase 1 which is at the heart of the programme since it focuses on policy learning and exchange of experience resulting in the production of actions plan for each participating region.
- Phase 2 which is dedicated to monitoring the implementation of action plans and the policy changes resulting from this implementation.

The present note aims at providing further information on the way to handle phase 2. This note is also a follow-up of the programme mid-term impact evaluation which identified the need for further guidance on the way to approach phase 2.

¹ Due to the specific characteristics of the 4th call projects (shorter duration of phase 1, lump sum), this note is primarily relevant for 1st, 2nd and 3rd call projects.



1. Reminder on Phase 2 rationale

The development of projects in two phases is an innovative measure introduced in Interreg Europe. The reason for including a second phase after the exchange of experience phase is two-fold:

- **The impact of interregional cooperation usually takes time**

Even if policy changes² can be achieved already during the exchange of experience phase, the main impact of interregional cooperation usually occurs on a mid-term / long term basis. With its focus on capacity building, Interreg Europe does not directly implement measures on the ground. The learnings generated from the project require time to bear fruits and are often dependant on external conditions. With the introduction of phase 2, projects should be in a better position to monitor the full impact of the cooperation. It ensures that policy changes achieved after phase 1 are still officially reported to the programme. Phase 2 lasts two years except for fourth call projects where its duration is reduced to one year.

- **The possibility to estimate the territorial effect of the policy change**

As reflected in the programme result indicators, the success of the programme is assessed in relation to the number of policy changes and amounts of funds influenced thanks to the cooperation. These indicators are important since they measure the direct impact of the programme. However, they do not tell anything about the tangible benefits these policy changes bring to the regions when implemented. Let's take an example with a project focusing on energy efficiency. As a result of the exchange of good practices, a region adopts a new intelligent lighting system for its public buildings leading to reduction of the energy consumption. The region discovered this new system thanks to the project and its adoption within the regional strategy for low carbon economy is therefore reported as a policy change achieved thanks to Interreg Europe. Then, even if it is no longer under the responsibility of Interreg Europe who does not finance the implementation of this measure, it is still very interesting for the programme to know the benefits gained by the region from the adoption of this new system (e.g. how many public buildings / square metres were equipped with the new lighting system?; which amount of energy saving was achieved?, how many CO2 emissions were saved). Phase 2 is a unique opportunity to report on these 'territorial effects'.

Therefore, by monitoring the implementation of action plans, phase 2 aims at better demonstrating the impact of interregional cooperation through:

- Monitoring the policy changes achieved thanks to the cooperation that happened after phase 1 (direct impact of Interreg Europe),
- Estimating when possible the territorial effects of these policy changes although this goes beyond the programme's objectives.

² Policy changes are the main results expected from the project. They occur when a policy instrument is influenced thanks to the project activities.



2. Phase 2 activities

2.1 Focus of phase 2 activities

Section 4.2.2 of the programme manual provides detailed information on the content and activities financed under phase 2. The distinctive feature of this phase is that it focuses on monitoring the implementation of activities that are not financed by the programme (with the exception of pilot actions). It is indeed up to the regions to support the implementation of the lessons learnt from the cooperation while the programme's intervention is limited to monitoring whether this implementation happens and lead to policy changes. This explains why the activities financed by the programme in this phase remain limited. These activities are in fact pre-defined by the programme. It also explains why the implementation of action plans is actually not part of the Interreg Europe programme's objectives. Nevertheless, the Interreg Europe' support to phase 2 remains fully legitimate considering that:

- A majority of policy changes are expected to occur in phase 2 and the programme should monitor its impact as extensively as possible,
- Phase 2 can also be a source of learning among the partners who should exchange and build on their experiences in implementing the action plans.
- A proper monitoring of the different action plans' implementation is possible only if the project partnership remains active in closely following this implementation at the local and interregional levels.

For these reasons, phase 2 is integral part of Interreg Europe projects. It also means that projects involved in phase 2 should continue participating in the programme / PLP related activities (e.g. annual events, PLP thematic workshops) in order to capitalise on their experiences and achievements.

2.2 Recommendation to ensure a successful implementation of phase 2

The programme evaluation highlighted that a pro-active monitoring in phase 2 contributes to keep the mobilisation and motivation of the concerned partners and stakeholders for implementing the action plans. In particular, it provides the following recommendation:

*Project partners should adopt a **pro-active approach to monitoring** the implementation of their action plans (i.e. not a passive “wait-and-see” position). This should also comprise an ongoing interaction with relevant regional or local actors, especially in those cases where stakeholder organisations are directly responsible for actually improving the addressed policy instruments. To support this, Interreg Europe should explore ways helping to ensure that stakeholder organisations are becoming actively involved into the regional / local or interregional processes for monitoring the action plan implementation.*

Within the pre-defined activities described in the application, the project can develop certain measures to maintain an active partnership and to ensure a proactive monitoring. Some ideas are provided in table 1.



Table 1: possible measures to ensure a successful phase 2

Type of activities	Possible measures	
	At the level of each partner	At project / lead partner level
a) action plan implementation follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer an electronic tool (e.g. shared table) where all actions are listed and where relevant stakeholders can indicate the progress made and any interesting developments. This tool can also be used to pass updates from the project and news from the other regions. - Ensure regular contacts with the stakeholders through phone calls, on-line meetings or even physical meetings if possible (some projects take the opportunity of existing events to meet their stakeholders). - Invite to the annual project meetings (and final conference) stakeholders who are successful in implementing actions. - If relevant, contact the final beneficiaries of the actions (e.g. SMEs) to assess the tangible effect of this implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share with the partners an overview table where each of the partners can indicate the main progress made in phase 2 - Ensure regular contacts with the partners through phone calls and on-line meetings (including possibility of bi lateral exchanges if specific difficulties are faced) - Closely involve all partners in the preparation and content of the annual project meeting - Identify concrete examples of success or difficulties within the project and spread them among the partners
b) Communication & dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the communication tools of the partners and relevant stakeholders (e.g. institution website, newsletter, social media) to regularly disseminate news and achievements on the project. - Keep the key persons in the regions informed (policy makers, elected members) about the progress and consider the possibility to invite them to the final high-level conference. - Develop storytelling on the results achieved (e.g. interviews of stakeholders or final beneficiaries) for further exploitation at regional or interregional level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the project website and social media channels to promote the achievements of phase 2 through articles, interviews, pictures, videos or any means that can illustrate the implementation - Closely involve all partners in the preparation and content of the final dissemination conference - Ensure the high level character of the final conference by inviting key policy makers of the participating regions - Ensure that the final conference provides concrete illustrations of the project achievements (e.g. by giving the floor to beneficiaries of the implemented actions).
c) Project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide the relevant stakeholders (i.e. those involved in the action plan implementation) with quarterly deadlines to report on the progress made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide the partners with quarterly deadlines to report on the progress made

Projects can also go beyond the activities pre-defined in the work plan. Other 'no cost or low cost' measures like additional stakeholder meetings may be important to keep the momentum of the project. The mid-term review meetings organised with the JS at the end of phase 1 is also an opportunity to see whether any additional activities are needed in phase 2 to support the implementation of action plans.



3. Programme's reporting expectations (phase 2 progress report)

In phase 2, the overall structure of the progress report remains the same. However, several instructions in the 'activity' and 'results' sections of the report are adapted to reflect the focus on action plan implementation. The following tables provide an overview of these sections, highlighting in **yellow** the adaptations from phase 1 and clarifying further the programme expectations for phase 2 reporting.

1. Insight into project's implementation

Sections	Instructions (adaptations highlighted in yellow)	Further explanation
1.1 Overview	Please describe the involvement of partners during the reporting period. Is this involvement according to the plans?	No change compared with phase 1.
	How did you ensure the proper monitoring of the action plan implementation? Was the monitoring process smooth or did you encounter any difficulties? Concrete examples are welcome.	An overview of the way the monitoring takes place should be provided in this section. The objective is to see whether phase 2 is implemented as initially planned or if any particular difficulties are faced.
	Were the relevant stakeholders actively involved in phase 2? Did the partnership carry out specific measures to keep the stakeholders interested and mobilised? Are there any differences among the participating regions in this regard?	This question still refers to the stakeholders involvement but is adapted to the context of phase 2 (e.g. possible participation in the annual project meetings). In particular the instructions refer to the 'relevant' stakeholders since only the organisations directly involved in the action plan implementation may be concerned.
	Participation in Policy Learning Platform	No change compared to phase 1. Projects are still expected to contribute and participate in the PLP activities in phase 2.
1.2 Storytelling	What are you particularly proud of in this reporting period?	No change compared with phase 1. In phase 2, the programme is very interested to get success stories on action plan implementation.
1.3 Work plan	Main outputs (<i>indicators</i>)	No change compared with phase 1. However, only the indicator related to the number of policy learning events and the two indicators related to communication (number of appearances in the media, average number of sessions) should in principle be updated. All other indicators refers to the learning process that took place under phase 1
	Reporting per year a) Action plan implementation b) Communication and c) Project management	Slight update to reflect the focus of phase 2 and the annual reporting but the principle remains the same: to report on the activities carried out during the reporting period (including pilot actions if relevant) compared to the activities initially planned in the application form



2. Insight into project's results/ Report on policy instruments progress

Sections	Instructions (highlighted in yellow when updated)	Further explanation
2.1 Overview	Overview table of result indicators	No change compared with phase 1.
2.2 Results per instrument	Overview table of policy instruments	No change compared with phase 1.
2.2.X Policy instrument	General features	No change compared with phase 1.
	<p>Action Plan implementation</p> <p>Please describe the overall progress made in the implementation of the action plan (including possible pilot actions). In particular, please describe which actions are already implemented (for those actions, please also indicate in the section below whether they can be considered as a policy change). In case implementation has not started yet, please explain why.</p>	<p>For each policy instrument, an overview of the progress made in implementing the action plan should be provided. Since Interreg Europe is not responsible for this implementation (apart from pilot actions), the report does not require a detailed description of the progress made for each action. Nevertheless, the information should be as specific as possible and additional information may also be provided as annexes to the progress report.</p> <p>A justification is also required when no implementation has taken place yet.</p>
	<p>Policy Change</p> <p>Has the project succeeded in influencing this policy instrument?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes, Please describe the nature of the change and how the project has contributed to this change? <p>Amount influenced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If no, can you report on the main reasons why the policy instrument could not be influenced yet? 	<p>Compared with phase 1, there is a direct link between this section on policy change and the previous section on action plan implementation. Indeed, in case the action is fully implemented, it should in principle be considered as a policy change (e.g. approval of a new project, launch of a new call, introduction of a new indicator system). If applicable, the amount of funds influenced should be estimated.</p> <p>The justification to be provided is obvious when the implementation of the action plan has not started. But the question is more relevant when the implementation of the action plan has started (according to the information provided in the previous section). In such a case, the project should explain why progress made in the implementation cannot (yet) be considered as a policy change.</p>
Territorial effect		No change compared with phase 1. However, phase 2 is the moment where the first tangible benefits of the policy change may be identified. Projects are therefore highly encouraged to continue monitoring the policy changes in order to estimate their territorial effects. Any information on possible improvement in the territorial situation is welcome.



Sections	Instructions (highlighted in yellow when updated)	Further explanation
		In this section, the self-defined performance indicators measure the possible territorial effects of the policy change (e.g. n° of SMEs supported, n° of jobs created, amount of CO2 emission saved). Within the progress reports, projects are welcome to propose new or revised self-defined indicators in order to properly measure these effects as soon as a policy change is reported.
2.3 Other achievements	Beyond the above policy impact, are there any unexpected achievements of the project?	No change compared with phase 1. Projects are still encouraged to report on any spin-offs results that may derive from the Interreg Europe projects (e.g. new cooperation agreement signed, approval of a new EU project).

Conclusion

Phase 2 is an integral part of Interreg Europe projects and its proper implementation is important to further demonstrate the role of interregional cooperation in improving regional development policies. In particular, phase 2 allows projects to continue monitoring the policy changes that derive from the learning process supported under phase 1. Still, phase 2 remains a novelty in this programming period and, beyond the annual reporting, lead partners should not hesitate to be in close contact with the Joint Secretariat to check any questions they may have or to solve any challenges they may face.

The Joint Secretariat will continue providing further guidance through different means (e.g. programme events, possible webinar, publication of examples). The present note may also be regularly updated to take into consideration the lessons learnt from the projects involved in phase 2.