Common methodology: the intervention cycle

The INTPA intervention cycle consists of four distinct phases: (a) programming, (b) design, (c) implementation and (d) closure.

Programming

During the programming phase, the priority areas, specific objectives, indicative financial allocations, results and specific indicators of EU international cooperation/partnership and development (whether for countries, regions or thematic areas) are defined.
This definition requires taking full account of the prevailing EU policy framework against an evolving political, cultural, social, environmental and economic situation and incorporating these policies and principles to work in collaboration with beneficiary countries and partners.
The main external financing instrument for 2021-27, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe) promotes joint programming with EU Member States working in a given country (see Working better together). This includes joint analysis of the country situation, a joint response or support to be provided and a joint assessment framework to measure progress. Joint analysis and joint response are together referred to as a 'joint strategy'. Joint programming may (or may not) lead to joint implementation.

Programming procedure in INTPA

The key output of this phase is the programming document, which covers the duration of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Under the Neighbourhoood, Development International Cooperation Instrument- Global Europe (NDICI-GE), the programming document is the multiannual indicative programme (MIP).
A Mid-term review of all MIPs will be carried out in 2021 and ad-hoc reviews can be also foreseen.

- For programming instructions, see Programming Instruction 2021-2027 🔒
- For multiannual and joint programming, see INTPA Companion Chapter 3 🔒

Process

The European External Action Service (EEAS) takes the lead for geographic programming and the thematic programmes on Human rights and democracy and Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention; INTPA takes the lead for thematic programming on Civil society organisations and Global Challenges. Programming documents are first discussed in country-regional-thematic team meetings involving relevant Commission directorates-general and services and then the object of an inter-services consultation. Documents are adopted by the Commission after discussion with Member States through the relevant comitology.

Design

The design phase needs to ensure a solid, evidence-based analysis and define the essential operational and financial aspects of an Action. It includes two successive steps carried out in a fully collaborative and inclusive manner - combining the knowledge and expertise of HQ and EU Delegations:

(1) Preparation of the Annual Action Plans (AAPs)

(2) Drafting the Action Documents (ADs)

Design phase - step one

In this first step of the design phase, the' different options for the intervention under preparation are considered. Rigorous upfront assessment ensures the intervention's formulation is grounded on solid, evidence-based analysis, and is in accordance with the relevant programming document, EU priorities and the partner's needs – and that these needs and related priorities are clearly identified and understood.

The key output of this step is the Annual Action Plan (AAP). This is an annual document or fiche including a summary of the Actions planned to be adopted during a given year. It is prepared through the co-creation collaborative process involving both Delegations and CCT/RCT/TCT - under the lead of the responsible service - and endorsed by the INTPA Strategic Steering Committee (SSC).

Through the Annual Action Plan, it is defined in broad terms what the intervention intends to do and achieve. Regardless of the chosen implementing modality, this requires:

- a thorough understanding of the context, which implies mapping and screening sector and other relevant policies, institutions and stakeholders (including other development partners and civil society);
- screening for existing/planned interventions and potential ones that could inform possible options for the intervention;
- looking into risks and assumptions and drawing on lessons learned from similar previous interventions (whether funded by the EU or other development partners);
- identification of possible options for the intervention, including recommended priorities (specific objectives/outcomes);
- assessing the relevance and feasibility of the most promising intervention;
- assessing relevant lessons learned that can guide the choices to be made during the formulation stage.

An indicative choice should be made about the implementing modality (e.g. budget support or blending). This includes a broad assessment of the anticipated scale of financial support required to successfully implement the intervention.

Design – Step 2

The drafting of an Action Document and its supporting documents (see Section 6.2.3) begins once the Annual Action Plan is approved by the Strategic Steering Committee.

In this second step of the design phase, the intervention is developed in detail. Its purpose is to define the intervention's essential features in terms of both operational and contractual/financial options: what the intervention intends to achieve and how it intends to achieve it. The work carried out during this phase is reflected in an Action Document, which will be an annex to the Commission's financing decision.

Design procedure in INTPA

AAP is prepared as a part of the SSC fiche; The SSC fiche (including AAP) is prepared under the responsibility of INTPA lead services (geographic and thematic directorates) in consultation with the relevant cooperation team (CCT/RCT/TCT) – as well as the relevant EEAS counterpart and is submitted by the relevant directorate to the Strategic Steering Committee.

The SSC endorses the AAP; drafting of the Action Documents, with support of CCT/RCT/TCT, can officially start

Action Documents are submitted to the Quality Review Meeting (QRM). The QRM:

- approve the AD. The Action can go ahead to the next stage
- ask to improve the AD, to be discussed in a new QRM (re-submission);
- decide to bring the AD to the SSC for discussion (Action abandoned or substantially revised).

Full procedure in INTPA Companion Chapter 6 - Designing actions 🔒

Implementation

During the implementation phase, interventions are carried out by implementing partners and monitored by INTPA. They are adjusted as necessary and made responsive to changing risks and assumptions. During this phase, the intervention is put into action based on what has been defined and validated in previous stages, articulated in an Action Document.

The implementation phase also entails managing, supervising and steering contract implementation (oversight, reporting, payments, audits), as well as managing relations with the partner country and implementing partners. The EU promotes joint implementation with its development partners in general and Member States in particular.

Monitoring is undertaken internally (field visits, review of reports, steering committee meetings) and externally (results-oriented monitoring — ROM) to ensure the intervention is proceeding as planned and delivering the anticipated outputs. A mid-term review might be performed to confirm the work plan, reassess the intervention logic or define corrective measures when monitoring reveals shortcomings. Audits/expenditure verifications may also be performed during implementation.

Reporting is the visible face of the monitoring system and should provide valuable information for decision-makers based on the selected set of indicators.

Implementation procedure in INTPA

Implementation of an intervention generally starts with the entry into force of the financing agreement (if any) or its first contract (in case there is no financing agreement).

- For implementing modalities, see INTPA Companion Chapter 5 🔒
- For types of contracts, see Practical Guide on Contract Procedure - PRAG
- For programme estimates, see Programme Estimates Guide.
- For joint implementation, see Capacity4dev - Joint Programming and Joint Implementation.

Process

The implementing modality of an intervention is the combination of

- type of financing (contractual relationship between the Commission and the beneficiary: budget support, grant, public procurement or financial instrument);
- management mode (direct – by the Commission - or indirect – through an implementing partner).

Closure

Closure is the intervention phase during which activities wind down, achievements are evaluated/assessed in depth and lessons are captured to feed into the knowledge cycle.

No financing decision or action can be closed until its respective individual legal commitments (contracts) are duly closed. Individual legal commitments have two closing dates: end date of activities (limit date to undertake or start any new activities under a contract) and final date of implementation (limit date for implementation of any activity and its related payments). After the final date for implementation, there is a closing period for a given commitment, during which only accounting and administrative operations are allowed.

Closure procedure in INTPA

In the context of budget support, the Delegation prepares a brief final report no later than three months after disbursement of the last tranche. This report seeks to draw lessons on key results and main challenges for future budget support interventions and to improve communication on results.

- See Final Report Budget Support.

A similar report is required for the closure of grant contracts and Delegation agreements.

- For closure of contracts (individual commitments), see INTPA Companion Chapter 9 🔒
- For closure of financing decisions, see INTPA Companion Chapter 15 🔒
- For evaluations, see Project and programme evaluations.
- For audits, see INTPA Companion Chapter 11 🔒

In the context of blending, reporting is the responsibility of the lead financial institution according to the provisions of the specific framework agreement or memorandum of understanding for the blending intervention. Some special elements of reporting are normally required related to the implementation of financial instruments beyond the standard indirect management requirements.

For blending, see Guidelines on EU blending operations

Process

Closure entails both administrative actions (e.g. final reporting, final payments, possibly a final audit, closure of contracts, closing of the financing decision) and a learning process (reflection on the intervention examining its efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact, so as to draw lessons for future interventions). If appropriate, an ex post evaluation is performed to confirm conclusions and draw lessons assessing all intervention stages to identify what went right, what went wrong and why.

- Stakeholder engagement and policy dialogue
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- The Human Rights Based Approach
- Mainstreaming political priorities

Common policy framework
Common emphasis on results