



# Ex-post Evaluation of 2007-2013 ENPI CBC Programmes

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Final Report  
Executive summary  
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*Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission*



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## Ex-post Evaluation of 2007-2013 ENPI CBC Programmes

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The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view which are not necessarily shared by the European Commission or by the authorities of the concerned countries



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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the performance of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in the EU neighbourhood funded in the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) 2007-2013, in order to draw lessons for the new generations of neighbourhood cross-border cooperation programmes, currently implemented under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) 2014-2020<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation was carried out on the basis of four OECD/DAC criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability)<sup>2</sup> plus the EC criteria of coherence and complementarity, EU value added, and lessons learned. It consisted of 8 evaluation questions agreed in the Inception Report.

In addition to this Executive Summary (**Section 1**), the Final Evaluation Report consists of an introduction presenting the objectives, scope and stages of the evaluation (**Section 2**), a background section contrasting the ENPI CBC original vision and assumptions with the context and reality of implementation (**Section 3**), an overview of projects funded under the 13 programmes (**Section 4**), an assessment of ENPI CBC performance frameworks (**Section 5**), the replies to the evaluation questions assessing the performance of ENPI CBC 2007-2013 against the evaluation criteria (**Section 6**) and a set of 7 recommendations to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and coherence of ongoing and future cross-border cooperation (**Section 7**). The Final Report is supplemented with 16 Annexes compiling and summarising information about ENPI and ENI CBC, including three case studies on the results and impact of ENPI CBC on specific borders and sectors (tourism development, marine environment and border management).

## 1.1 Context and overall achievements

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004, with its core aim to support and foster stability, security and prosperity across the EU Neighbourhood. In 2007, the European Commission introduced a new financial instrument (ENPI) to contribute to the implementation of ENP, in particular through cross-border and regional cooperation. In this context, the ENPI CBC Strategy Paper (2007), laid down the four key (strategic) objectives of ENPI CBC, which were the foundation of ENPI CBC programmes.

The financial resources allocated to the ENPI CBC 2007-2013 amounted to € 947.2 million combining funds from ENPI, ERDF and IPA. The contribution from participating countries and/or project beneficiaries brought the total allocation to € 1.2 billion.

The 13 ENPI CBC programmes implemented during the period covered nine EU land borders, three sea basins and one sea crossing. The programmes involved 34 countries, 19 EU member states and 12 of the 16 ENP partner countries plus Norway, Russia and Turkey.

Altogether, the programmes funded 941 projects over the period for a total contracted amount of €910 million (April 2017), out of which 38% was channelled to projects promoting economic development, 32% to environment, 19% for social development and 11% for security issues. The bulk of EC funding (70%) was channelled through standard projects selected through calls for proposals. Large-scale projects (LSPs) represented 22% of the total EU funding contracted (approximately €195 million), while strategic projects covered a minor share (8% of the total EU funding contracted). In total, there were 867 standard projects, 51 LSPs and 23 strategic projects. The participation in calls for proposals has been very high (in total, more than 7,000 applications were submitted across all programmes), attesting the appeal of CBC among stakeholders in the

<sup>1</sup> In the present report, ENPI CBC means CBC programmes implemented under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (2007-2013) while ENI CBC means the next generation of CBC programmes implemented under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (2014-20).

<sup>2</sup> The relevance of ENPI CBC programmes was assessed by the Mid-Term Evaluation carried out in 2013. The evaluation concluded to “a high degree of relevance of the ENPI CBC programme priorities both in terms of correspondence with the ENPI CBC strategy objectives and the needs of the programme area”.



eligible areas. In total, ENPI CBC involved 4,569 organisations from 36 different countries, out of which 2,106 were from partner countries.

As of April 2017, contracting rates were close to 100% of the funding allocated for all programmes. Overall, 85% of the EU allocations to projects had been disbursed (€732.3 million). These figures, however, are not final since 146 projects were still ongoing in April 2017. The amount of project expenditures approved by JMAs stood at 75% (€645.9 million) of the allocation to projects in April 2017.

## 1.2 Performance assessment of ENPI CBC 2007-2013

The evaluation questions addressed in the Inception Report provide the foundation for assessing ENPI CBC 2007-2013's performance against the evaluation criteria in the ToR:

**Effectiveness:** ENPI CBC resulted in an impressive number and variety of cross-cooperation projects with a high participation from partner countries. Compared to the previous period, ENPI CBC brought a higher degree of cooperation between EU and partner countries, which contributed to the development of more genuine and sustainable partnerships. In that sense, the ENPI CBC added an important territorial dimension to the ENP extending the principles of territorial cooperation developed in the context of the EU Cohesion Policy to the external borders of the EU. One of the major outcomes of ENPI CBC is the strengthening of capacities of CBC stakeholders across the neighbourhood. There is at present a much more solid basis for cooperation compared to the previous period, with well-established programme authorities, more experienced beneficiaries and a high degree of trust and commitment among officials from EU and partner countries. While the effectiveness of projects (and ultimately programmes) was affected by complex legal and regulatory frameworks and geo-political instabilities, there are many examples of successful cooperation delivering worthwhile outputs and results. Unfortunately, there is an absence of reliable, hard evidence to construct a comprehensive picture of programme effectiveness, due to weaknesses in the performance frameworks at programme level (shortcomings in both the intervention logic and the indicators) and the disconnect with the project level.

**Efficiency:** The fact that all 13 programmes managed to complete the ENPI implementation cycle with very high contracting rates is an achievement worth emphasising, especially bearing in mind that some programmes did not exist before ENPI or were launched under a new set-up. There were of course variations in the level of performance from one programme to another which are reflected in the effective use of funds.

The implementation delays experienced across almost all programmes, and the need for extending implementation deadlines, reflect the late start of the programmes, the long selection and contracting stages and the difficulties encountered during implementation. A major challenge for all CBC stakeholders was to learn how to implement programme/project activities in line with EU requirements while, at the same time, ensuring compliance with national regulatory frameworks. The efficiency of many projects was also affected by the political and economic instabilities experienced during the programming period. At project level, the JTSS and their branch offices played a crucial role in managing contracts and supporting beneficiaries to overcome the difficulties of implementation.

When successful, large-scale projects brought tangible benefits for the local economy and had a high visibility. However, their selection was not always based on strong strategic and cost-effectiveness considerations and their implementation often took up considerable time and capacities from the management structures to resolve legal and administrative issues connected to their implementation.

A major weakness in the management of ENPI CBC was related to monitoring and evaluation activities. At project level, many beneficiaries had a weak understanding of project intervention logic and paid insufficient attention to the design and monitoring of indicators of achievement.



There was a lack of connection between programme and project performance frameworks which made it difficult for managing authorities to measure the progress towards programme objectives.

The EC technical assistance (TA) projects<sup>3</sup> contributed positively to the effective functioning of the programmes but the fact that there were two different projects implemented according to different calendars created some confusion among stakeholders and reduced efficiency. In their supportive role, the TA projects were not always able to provide accurate and timely clarifications and instructions to programme management structures and final beneficiaries, which occasionally affected programme implementation.

Support and guidance from the EC was always highly valued by CBC stakeholders. However, the EC faced considerable challenges in overseeing and coordinating the parallel implementation of 13 programmes with its limited human resources and frequent staff turnover, which reduced its capacity to provide definitive and timely guidance to CBC stakeholders.

**Impact:** The diversity of objectives and the broadly-formulated priorities diminished the overall impact of programmes. Even with greater focus, impact would be hard to measure, given the scale of the programmes, but was made harder due to insufficient performance data.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the impact of ENPI CBC must be viewed in the wider context of geo-political and economic developments. In normal circumstances, the ambitious objectives of ENPI CBC programmes would be difficult to reach given the modest amounts involved by the cooperation in relation to needs, but the political and economic instability experienced in the neighbourhood over the period rendered the original strategic aims of the respective CBC programmes even less achievable despite many examples within each programme of successful cooperation that had an impact on their specific area of intervention.

The level of cross-border cooperation reached thanks to ENPI CBC is, however, an achievement which should not be underestimated, especially in the current geo-political context. The programmes played – and continue to play - an extremely valuable role in developing and maintaining contacts and dialogue between people while promoting EU values and practices across the neighbourhood.

**Sustainability:** The durability of benefits derived from ENPI CBC is not easy to assess, due to a lack of data concerning the sustainability of results, the continuation of partnerships and the long-term impact of projects. Demand-driven projects with strong ownership, long-term partnership and links to regional/national levels had better prospects of sustainability. In the case of successful large-scale/strategic projects, the involvement of key state bodies usually guaranteed the long-term sustainability of results in both financial and institutional terms.

While there are examples of standard projects benefiting from the support of local and even national authorities, the mainstreaming of project results into national policies were an exception. Moreover, the continuation of project activities usually depended on the next calls for proposals.

Regarding the long-term prospects of CBC across the neighbourhood, the framework for cross-border cooperation is well established. This is not only true for the managing structures but also for many partnerships created under the ENPI CBC, which are being pursued in the new period.

**Coherence and complementarity:** ENPI CBC tended to be implemented in isolation of the rest of the Neighbourhood Policy. While the broadly formulated objectives and priorities of the ENPI CBC programmes ensured that the risk of contradiction with other interventions was relatively small, ENPI CBC was insufficiently articulated with other EU instruments and political initiatives. There were also limited connections with national and regional policies of participating countries. This disconnect has reduced the overall impact of the programmes. When synergies and complementarities were achieved, this was more the result of the projects themselves than programme incentives and/or mechanisms.

<sup>3</sup> Regional Capacity Building Initiative (RCBI) and INTERACT ENPI



**EU added value:** ENPI CBC made a distinct contribution to regional/local development policies in the neighbourhood, fostering a greater involvement of local actors, promoting partnerships, and stimulating creative responses to common challenges. In the context of scarce public resources, the programmes represented an important source of funding without which local development goals would often not have been achieved. From the viewpoint of many beneficiaries, the added value of the programmes lies primarily in their capacity to mobilise partners across the border, overcoming the serious obstacles and barriers (physical and otherwise) that hinder the cooperation between the EU and its neighbourhood.

**Lessons learned:** The ENI programming and implementation environment has evolved markedly in five key areas from the ENPI framework: the strategic objectives of CBC have been streamlined with greater focus; the management, control and audit arrangements have been strengthened in all countries, but especially in partner countries; the rules on selecting projects, tendering and contracting are more appropriate to shared management including more detailed provisions for large infrastructure projects. Comparing the programming and implementation frameworks in the ENPI and ENI regulations, the latter has clearly taken on board lessons from the ENPI experience, and inevitably this has shaped the ENI CBC programmes. The decision to have only one technical assistance facility dedicated to ENI CBC was also well justified.

The relaxation of the ENPI requirement to apply the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) to calls for proposals provides greater flexibility to link programme and project performance frameworks. The ENI CBC regulation puts also more emphasis on result-oriented programme and project monitoring. Overall, these changes should both improve, and make it easier to assess, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact, although the quality of performance frameworks continues to depend on the structure and suitability of objectives and indicators and the links established between programme and project levels.

## 1.3 Recommendations

The report concludes with seven sets of recommendations to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of ongoing and future ENI CBC programmes.

### R1. Enhance focus and impact of ENI CBC

**R1.1** Continue ENI CBC beyond 2020, with an increased strategic focus to maximise impact in line with the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially for sea-basin programmes, and only minor changes to the regulatory framework to maintain momentum from 2014-2020.

**R1.2** Give more weight in project appraisal and greater attention at the selection stage to the impact and sustainability, including the cross-border dimension, and reflect these requirements in information and training for applicants and assessors.

### R2. Seek more synergies with other EU instruments and policies

**R2.1** Integrate ENI CBC with other ENP instruments and EU external policies, and ensure closer linkages of CBC programmes with other strategies, programmes and initiatives at regional, national and EU levels.

**R2.2** Explore how to increase consistency between ENI CBC and Interreg regulatory frameworks, templates and tools.

**R2.3** Enhance DG NEAR capacities to provide guidance and analyse overall performance of ENI CBC, and coordinate with DG REGIO over CBC in all its forms.

**R2.4** Carry out a study of cross-border needs and obstacles to cooperation to identify bottlenecks and suggest measures to national authorities.

### R3. Improve relevance and ownership of programmes

**R3.1** Achieve more balanced partnerships through commensurate contributions from partner countries



**R3.2** Towards the end of the current financial perspective, review the relative merits of bilateral and multi-country programmes (based on ENPI and ENI experience), with potentially new combinations of CBC countries to increase the homogeneity of programme areas.

#### **R4. Enhance the added-value of large-scale projects**

**R4.1** Broaden the perspective of large-scale projects to truly strategic operations (which might include infrastructure) and in the case of research projects, these should concern the application of innovation, and not basic research.

**R4.2** Expand the role of the Neighbourhood Investment Platform in securing funding for CBC infrastructure projects and support the development of the latter through a Project Preparation Facility for ENI CBC

#### **R5. Improve programme efficiency**

**R5.1** Ensure early adoption of the ENI CBC regulatory and financing framework post-2020 to avoid reduced programme and project implementation periods.

**R5.2** Consider introducing financial flexibility within the total ENI CBC allocation to support urgent projects that respond to opportunities or threats.

**R5.3** Increase the frequency and improve focus of calls for proposals to increase their impact, speed up project selection and contracting and simplify rules, procedures and templates.

**R5.4** Consider measures to speed up payment cycles to resolve cash flow problems in participating countries

**R5.5** Consider simplifying State aid requirements for CBC projects

**R5.6** Allow more flexibility in the use of savings from projects to improve the absorption and use of funds.

**R5.7** Require/reinforce the presence of management structures in the border regions through JTSs and branch offices.

#### **R6. Improve performance frameworks and monitoring and evaluation practices**

**R6.1** Strengthen the performance frameworks and their practical application through focused calls, project selection and implementation, enhancing the capacities of programme authorities and project beneficiaries, and allowing flexibility in post-2020 ENI to review and refine frameworks in response to evolving circumstances.

**R6.2** Improve IT tools for programme management, monitoring and evaluation, drawing from experience within Cohesion Policy and Interreg and enhance the capacities of programme authorities to analyse context (including use of statistics) and draw up evidence-based strategies.

**R6.3** Consider establishing a permanent Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Facility for ENI CBC to support CBC stakeholders, enhance results and impact and strengthen the learning process in view of future cycles

#### **R7. Strengthen the technical assistance and support to programmes**

**R7.1** Continue the EC TA to CBC programmes as valued support to programme authorities and the interface with the European Commission, with renewed emphasis on simplification, results-based management and capitalisation.

**R7.2** Ensure that the programmes' technical assistance budget reflect better the programme's actual need for technical assistance.

