



CBC 2014-2020
SOUTH-EAST FINLAND - RUSSIA

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EX-POST EVALUATION OF THE SOUTH-EAST FINLAND – RUSSIA CBC
2014-2020 PROGRAMME

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1. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The ex-post evaluation of the South-East Finland - Russia ENI CBC 2014-2020 Programme serves a multifaceted purpose. It is conducted to deliver a comprehensive, independent assessment of the programme's effectiveness and the impacts of its implementation. This evaluation not only provides invaluable insights for decision-makers at both national and regional levels, but also plays a pivotal role in aiding the European Commission in refining (co-)financing mechanisms and crafting new financing instruments.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the operating landscape of the South-East Finland - Russia Programme has undergone significant shifts. The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to substantial changes. In response, the European Commission, in early March 2022, suspended the Financing Agreements that had been established for the CBC programs between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Consequently, this suspension halted the participation of Russian beneficiaries in project implementation and the involvement of Russian Federation representatives in Programme execution. This disruption was compounded by the prior impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Programme implementation.

While the primary focus of the evaluation remains on the Programme's performance, it is imperative to adjust the perspective to account for the influence of these global crises on Programme execution.

Since March 2022, all EU cooperation activities with the Russian Federation and Belarus have been suspended due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. This aggression has also halted the preparation of Interreg NEXT 2021-2027 programs involving Russia and Belarus. The prospect of new EU programs with these countries in the near future appears uncertain. The findings of this evaluation inform policy development and strategy formulation, as they offer insights into what has worked well and what areas require attention. This data can guide the creation of more effective (co-)financing mechanisms and financing instruments, benefiting not only the South-East Finland – Russia programme but also broader European Commission initiatives.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

2.1 OVERVIEW AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Programmes promoting Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) have been implemented during the programming period 2014-2020 at the external borders of the European Union under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

Implementation of the Programme is conducted according to the General provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument (EU) No 897/2014), adopted on 18 August 2014 and amended on 23 June 2020 (EU) No 2020/879) and 9 November 2022 (EU) No 2022/2192, financed under Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 966/2012 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities. ENI CBC programmes receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as well as from the European

Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The main objective behind the financial allocation to the Programme's thematic objectives (priorities) is to achieve the targeted results with the available resources.

The changes within the legal framework exert a substantial influence on the execution of the programme and how the Joint Operational Programme document is perceived. These alterations need to be taken into careful consideration during the ex-post evaluation process. Initially, Regulations No 232/2014 and 897/2014 provided the legal framework for the program's initial phase of implementation. However, the landscape shifted significantly during the programme's disruption, with the introduction of the new Regulation No 2022/2192 serving as the guiding legal framework during that period.

In addition to the legal framework mentioned earlier, a separate Financing Agreement was collectively signed by the European Union, Finland and the Russian Federation at the outset of the programme's implementation. It lays down the fundamental principles governing the collaborative execution of the Programme. Notably, this Financing Agreement was endorsed by the participating countries and the European Commission following the adoption of the Joint Operational Programme by the European Commission.

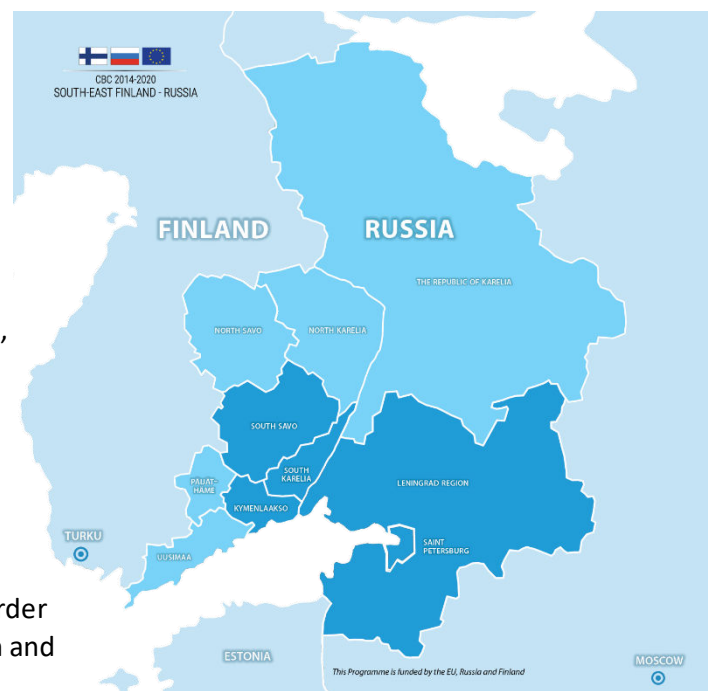
However, it is essential to recognize that due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Financing Agreements between the EU, Finland, and the Russian Federation have been put on hold. Consequently, cross-border cooperation with Russia has been suspended, and there are no immediate expectations for its revival, at least not in the near future. As a result, project partners in Finland have continued to carry out ongoing project activities within the existing programme.

2.2. PROGRAMME AREA

The South-East Finland – Russia ENI CBC 2014-2020 eligible programme area includes the regions of Kymenlaakso, South Karelia and South Savo in Finland and the Leningrad region and the City of Saint Petersburg in Russia. The adjacent regions include the regions of Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme, North Savo, North Karelia in Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia. Starting from March 2022, the participation of Republic of Karelia, Leningrad Region and Saint-Petersburg is suspended. The ex-post evaluation will be carried out in Finland only.

2.3. PROGRAMME STRATEGY

On the basis of the objectives defined for cross border cooperation in the EU regulation and in the Russian and Finnish strategic documents, and of the needs and challenges identified above, the following overall objective is defined for the South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme:



The Programme will contribute to economic and social development, mitigate common challenges and promote mobility among actors of regional relevance to further improve cross-border cooperation and the sustainable prerequisites of the Programme area.

The overall objective will be achieved with improved competitiveness, increased economic activity, knowledge based economy, skilled labour force, high-level cultural events and tourism, pure nature and waters, easy mobility, good transport corridors, smooth and modern border crossing points. These are also the principal regional needs identified in the regional strategies.

Consequently, the South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014–2020 Programme has chosen four themes:

1. Business and SME development (Strategic objective A), TO1
2. Support to education, research, technological development and innovation (Strategic objective A), TO2
3. Environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation (Strategic objective B), TO6
4. Promotion of border management and border security, mobility and migration management (Strategic objective C), TO10

2.4. BUDGET, NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The total financial frame of the Programme is 77 509 964 euros including 36 146 782 from the EC. The Finnish national co-financing amounts to 23 289 791 euros, and the Russian national funding for the Programme is 18 073 391 euros. The Programme is co-financed by the European Union from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), Finland and the Russian Federation (until March 2022), each with their national and regional financing. The project beneficiaries' own contribution is not included in the financing plan.

Annex 1

2014 – 2020 indicative					
Priority / Thematic Objective (TO)	EC Co-financing (a)	Finland Co-financing (b)	Russia Co-financing (c)	Co- financing rate (in %) (d)	Total funding 2014-2020 (e) = (a)+(b)+(c)
Priority 1 (TO 1)	9 325 870	4 662 935	4 662 935	50	18 651 740
	*9 325 870	*2 362 935	*4 212 935	*41	*15 901 740
	**9 495 870	**2 822 935	**4 827 935	**45	**17 146 740
Priority 2 (TO 2)	4 554 494	2 277 247	2 277 247	50	9 108 988
	*5 054 494	*1 577 247	*1 577 247	*38	*8 208 988
	**5 264 494	**1 754 247	**2 485 247	**45	**9 503 988
Priority 3 (TO 6)	7 807 706	3 903 853	3 903 853	50	15 615 412
	*9 307 706	*2 503 853	*5 873 853	*47	*17 685 412
	**9 077 706	**2 358 853	**5 693 853	**47	**17 130 412
Priority 4 (TO 10)	10 844 034	5 422 017	5 422 017	50	21 688 068
	*8 844 034	*15 038 417	*4 602 017	*69	*28 484 468
	**8 694 034	**14 546 417	**3 259 017	**67	**26 499 468
TOTAL PRIORITIES	32 532 104 *32 532 104	16 266 052 *21 482 452	16 266 052 *16 266 052	50 *54	65 064 208 * 70 280 608
Technical assistance	3 614 678	1 807 339	1 807 339	50	7 229 356
	36 146 782 *36 146 782	18 073 391 * 23 289 791	18 073 391 *18 073 391	50 *53	72 293 564 * 77 509 964

The number of contracted projects is 71, 9 of which are Large Infrastructure Projects (LIPs) and 62 standard projects.

As a response to the pandemic restrictions, the European Commission made changes to the Implementing Regulation in 2020. Among these adjustments was an extension of the programme's implementation period by one year, now reaching until the close of 2023. Consequently, all programme closure activities are required to conclude by the end of September 2024.

The Managing Authority has stipulated that the completion of all activities within South-East Finland – Russia CBC projects must be accomplished by the end of June 2023.

2.5. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The Regional Council of South Karelia in Finland has been designated by the participating countries to serve as the Managing Authority (MA) for the Programme. The MA assumes the responsibility for the daily oversight of the Programme, which encompasses tasks such as managing project selection procedures and entering into Grant Contracts with the Lead Partners of projects. Furthermore, the MA's role includes vigilant tracking and monitoring of project implementation, overseeing financial management and payment processes, as well as managing communication and information dissemination activities. The Managing Authority has also established a Branch Offices in Saint-

Petersburg, Russia. Unfortunately, the Russian Branch Office was closed at the end of March 2022 due to Russia's actions in Ukraine.

At the top of the Programme's decision-making structure is the Joint Monitoring Committee, responsible for supervising Program implementation, reviewing plans and reports from the Managing Authority, approving project selection criteria, and making final decisions on project selection. To ensure thorough evaluation of project proposals, the Committee has formed Regional Assessment Groups within participating countries. The Joint Monitoring Committee includes representatives from central governments and regional entities in each participating country and region. The Russian members have not participated in the Committee's work since February 2022.

Each participating country has appointed a National Authority to support the Managing Authority in Program management, in line with principles of financial responsibility. Additionally, the participating countries have designated the Ministry of Finance of Finland to oversee the Audit Authority function within the Programme. The Audit Authority ensures that audits adhere to regulations and the Programme's Management and Control System, and it conducts sample checks on projects and reviews the Programme's annual accounts.

3. DETAILS OF THE EVALUATION TASK

3.1. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The main goal of the evaluation is to independently assess Program implementation, effectiveness, and impacts in the Finnish parts of the Programme area. During the evaluation of Programme impact, attention will be centered on the Finnish parts of the Programme area. However, when appraising aspects like project selection, the assessment shall encompass the entire Programme area. This broader perspective will gauge how project selection aligns with the objectives outlined in the Joint Operational Programme and whether it ensures equitable representation across all participating regions.

The evaluation primarily examines achievements and results, seeking evidence of their connection to Programme implementation and identifying factors driving or hindering progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020) and Russian aggression toward Ukraine (2022) significantly impacted Programme implementation. The evaluation must account for these exceptional circumstances. COVID-19 caused administrative challenges but didn't alter the essence of work. In contrast, the Russian aggression halted cross-border cooperation with Russia, leading to a disruption phase with updated legal provisions.

The Programme can be viewed in two phases: the CBC phase, driven by the Joint Operational Programme, and the disruption phase following the suspension of Financing Agreements. The transition between these two phases can be seen as having occurred around February 24, 2022, despite the official suspension of Financing Agreements on March 10, 2022. A new regulation, enacted in November 2022 by the Commission, has been crafted to facilitate the implementation of programs during this second phase. The evaluation must encompass both phases of implementation. In the context of the first phase, it should seek evidence of relevance and alignment with the Joint Operational Programme, as well as assess the pandemic's impact on performance and the

attainment of planned Program results. In the second phase, the evaluation extends beyond risk reduction to examine Programme's resilience, relevance, and its impact for Finland, taking into account the evolving needs in this new context.

3.2. SCOPE AND KEY ISSUES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation will encompass the South-East Finland - Russia ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme and its implementation throughout the programme period. It is structured around key issues and additional themes that constitute the thematic scope of the evaluation, divided into two main parts:

1. Assessment of Program Performance and Outcomes

- Assessing how well Programme activities and achieved outcomes align with the Priority Axes and Thematic Objectives stipulated in the Joint Operational Programme;
- Evaluating the pertinence of Program activities and realized results concerning the horizontal modalities and cross-cutting issues delineated in the Joint Operational Programme;
- Scrutinising the efficiency of activities and the durability of outcomes and their effects within the programme area in Finland;
- Examining the regional influence: Understanding how Programme activities' effects materialise in various regions within Finland. This stage involves reviewing and computing Programme result indicators specified for each Priority Axis. It's worth noting that due to the program disruption, a direct comparison with predetermined target values may not be feasible, but a comprehensive analysis remains essential.

2. Broader Context and External Factors

- Examining how the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to the suspension of cross-border cooperation, has affected the implementation of the Programme;
- Assessing the Programme's alignment with other EU regional development instruments and its compatibility with the goals of international cooperation forums

The evaluator has flexibility in how these themes are integrated into the analysis. It's possible to treat them separately or in various combinations. Some issues may warrant individual sections with concise analyses, while others may be better suited to a cross-cutting approach.

3.3. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The provided evaluation questions are suggestive and subject to change. The ultimate evaluation questions will align with the thematic scope defined earlier. After initial discussions and document analysis guided by the indicative evaluation questions, the evaluation team will put forth a comprehensive and finalized set of evaluation questions in their Inception Report. These questions will become legally binding upon approval of the Inception Report.

Suggested evaluation questions:

1. What enduring advantages have the participating regions in Finland gained from the Programme, considering the current pause in EU-Russia territorial collaboration?
2. How effectively has the Programme adhered to the horizontal principles outlined in the Joint Operational Programme?
3. In retrospect, which Programme objectives remained unattained, and were these failures attributed to implementation disruptions or other causes?
4. Considering the Programme's conclusion, what enduring impact and lessons can be discerned for future regional initiatives and interregional cooperation?
5. To what degree has the Programme succeeded in realizing its goals, while accounting for any distractions during implementation?
6. In light of the changed circumstances, what may the future landscape of the Finnish regions look like?
7. What insights and experiences can be extracted from this Programme to inform the development of novel funding mechanisms and cooperative strategies?
8. Have there been any unforeseen positive outcomes or unintended consequences that have emerged as a result of the Programme?
9. What challenges did the Programme encounter in its execution, and how were these obstacles effectively addressed?
10. How has the community's perception of the Programme evolved over time, and how has it influenced the Programme's overall success?
11. Can the valuable practices and lessons learned from this Programme be translated into practical applications for other cross-border collaboration initiatives?
12. What key recommendations can be proposed to enhance the design and implementation of future cross-border cooperation endeavors?

4. CONTENTS AND FRAMEWORK OF THE EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation plan submitted by interested bidders must encompass, at a minimum, the following details:

1. A comprehensive overview of the proposed evaluation team, substantiating their expertise and experience. This should include the team leader and delineation of roles for other evaluators.
2. A description of the chosen approach and methodology for conducting the evaluation. The proposed methodology should align with the primary evaluation questions and the evaluation's outlined scope in this document. If interviews are part of the plan, it should include details about the selection method and criteria for interviewees. It's important to note that the evaluation is anticipated to be conducted as a desk and online study, with no physical travel required (please consider that online meetings are the primary mode of interaction).

3. A work plan that outlines a timeline, highlighting key milestones and significant points in the evaluation process.

5. DELIVERABLES AND TIMETABLE

The evaluation is scheduled to commence in November 2023, with the provisional final report due for submission to the Managing Authority by the close of May 2024.

The anticipated deliverables encompass:

- Inception Report, complete with a comprehensive methodology, to be provided subsequent to contract signing. This inception report can be presented as either a presentation or a written document.
- A preliminary evaluation report intended for review by the Managing Authority of the South-East Finland – Russia Programme.
- The definitive evaluation report along with an accompanying summary.
 - *The summary should incorporate key observations and recommendations as articulated by the evaluation team.*
- A presentation highlighting the evaluation findings and recommendations.

All official documentation resulting from this work must be presented in English.

6. BUDGET

The upper limit for the ex-post evaluation budget must not surpass EUR 55,000€ (excluding VAT). This allocation is intended to cover both the expenses related to the evaluation tasks and any essential travel expenses (please bear in mind that online meetings are the primary mode of interaction). Any proposal exceeding this budget limit will not be considered.

The indicative budget should be itemized into the following segments:

- a. Expenses related to the evaluation tasks
- b. Approximate estimation of travel-related expenses
- c. The total anticipated costs

7. SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY FOR THE EVALUATION TEAM

The bidder must provide references indicating their previous experience in assessing European Union-funded programs or projects. Additionally, the evaluation report is required to be in English.

8. ALREADY CONDUCTED OR SCHEDULED ASSESSMENTS ON THE SAME SUBJECT

An evaluation of Large Infrastructure Projects has been done 2022 by MDI Public Ltd and final report related on that has been published December 2022. The evaluation has been done of five border crossing point development projects on the Finnish-Russian border under the Karelia, Kolarctic and South-East Finland -Russia CBC programmes. The evaluation examined the projects using the five standard evaluation criteria, namely: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. In addition, the evaluation assessed the added value of the projects in terms of cross-border cooperation and border crossings and the added value to the respective programme and its area. Furthermore, cross-cutting issues of environmental sustainability and gender equality were also considered.

9. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS AND RELATED LEGISLATIVE BASIS

The South-East Finland – Russia ENI CBC Joint Operational Programme (programme document), as well as the EU regulations guiding the implementation of all ENPI CBC programmes, are available on the programme website:

[SEFR CBC | Programmes](#)

The regulation (EU) 2022/2192 laying down specific provisions for the 2014-2020 cooperation programmes following programme implementation disruption are available in the following address:

[EUR-Lex - 32022R2192 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)