

## Fact sheet 2: Project generation

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### 2.1. How to develop your project

2014-2020 Interreg programmes have a clear thematic focus and are result-oriented. The programme authorities have outlined in the cooperation programme what they want to improve in the Atlantic Area.

Therefore, projects financed under the Atlantic Area Programme must contribute to delivering the Programme objectives, impacts and changes it wants to achieve.

#### ***What positive change will your project bring to the cooperation territory?***

The answer to this question will help you to develop your project.

Projects must:

- ✓ Contribute to programme results;
- ✓ Apply under one specific objective of the programme only;
- ✓ Clearly target their goals on the chosen programme specific objective;
- ✓ Choose activities, outputs and indicators linked to the targeted specific objective;
- ✓ Identify the relevant target groups within the thematic field of the objective.

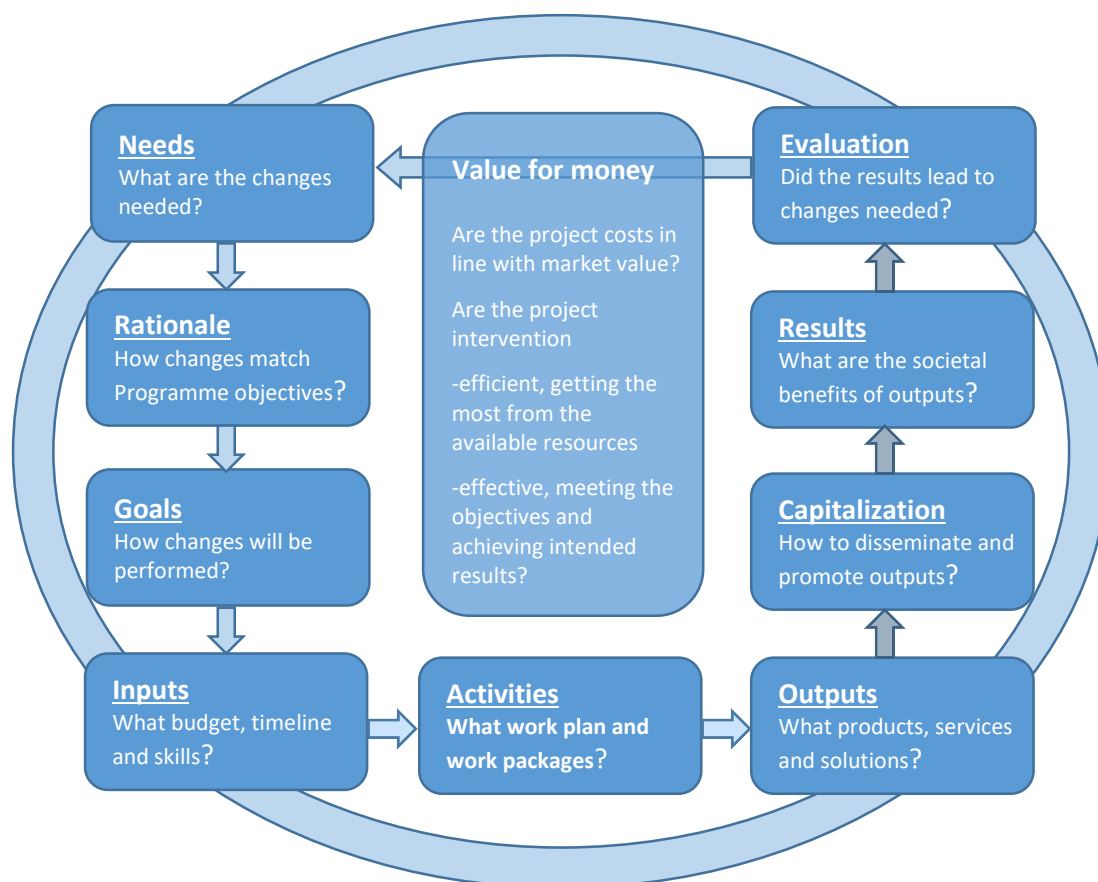
Programme results are achieved through quality projects, which must be clearly linked to the programme's strategy and intervention logic.

A project is an undertaking that must be structured according to a particular intervention logic.

The programme uses the following project intervention logic:



The programme uses the following project intervention logic:



## 2.2. What makes a quality project?

### 2.2.1 Cooperation according to the basics of European Territorial Cooperation regulation

The EU Regulation stipulates four cooperation criteria that specifically characterise territorial cooperation projects<sup>1</sup>. The four cooperation criteria provide guidelines and help applicants to improve their proposal:

1. **Joint development:** the project idea and scope are jointly developed by the partners.
2. **Joint implementation:** the activities, outputs and results are jointly realised by the partners.

<sup>1</sup> Article 12.4 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

3. **Joint staffing:** all partners have equal responsibility for joint staffing roles and their application within the project.
4. **Joint financing:** all partners contribute financially to the project resources.

### **Atlantic Area projects are required to meet all four criteria**

A condition for funding a project will be that it will improve something on the territory and that a segment of the population will benefit from the project in the long run. The project has to show how partners will work together towards a common goal. If the project could happen without this cooperation, then it would not be an Interreg Atlantic Area project.

#### ***2.2.2. Drafting a Proposal: some concepts and guidelines***

##### **1. Definition of needs and strategic relevance**

Projects should address a common challenge across the programme area and how best to utilise joint assets: a real need must be demonstrated. Projects should demonstrate how they will deliver wider strategies (EU/national/regional/local), including Regional Smart Specialisations Strategies when applicable. They should illustrate how they will use knowledge, expertise and skills across the programme. Projects must, therefore, demonstrate both the need and its strategic relevance to qualify for programme funding. The programme will not support basic research projects or purely academic networking.

##### **2. Transnational and territorial relevance**

This concept is one of the key requirements for a project to be funded. Each project has to clearly contribute to the chosen programme specific objective, tackling development needs and territorial challenges that are shared across the regions participating in the project. It means that:

- ✓ The problems identified cannot be efficiently solved by individual regions or countries working on their own. This could be either:
  - An issue affecting a clearly defined transnational geographical area (e.g., environmental risk management), or
  - A common issue of interest for which transnational cooperation leads to more innovative and efficient solutions;
- ✓ Solutions, products, services and processes are jointly developed by organisations in different MS working together in a project, thereby showing a clear transnational added value, going beyond the mere addition of results independently achievable in the involved regions.

- ✓ Projects have to demonstrate an integrated approach to regional development, where possible, combining thematic and territorial dimensions;
- ✓ Where relevant, the link to Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies must be set.

Project outputs should be embedded in a transnational working approach. All partners have to actively participate in the project according to their functions and expertise, in order to achieve the collective project results.

A genuine transnational approach implies that each project partner is allocated a specific role in the project, that there is a balanced involvement of partners from both the financial and activity point of view, spread over the different MS of the programme area.

Projects are not considered transnational if they just consist of a series of local actions which are linked only through a vague thematic relationship and/or an ex-post exchange of experience among partners without any joint implementation.

Projects that do not address an issue of transnational relevance or that cover only regional or cross-border issues will not be supported by the Atlantic Area Programme.

**The transnational co-operation character and territorial relevance has to be clearly demonstrated throughout the entire project (including the project approach and work plan)**

### 3. Partnership structure

In order to achieve tangible project results it is essential to involve the relevant partners who best suit the needs and targets of the project. All partners must be able to drive the project forward in their specialist area (i.e., capacities in development or implementation, etc.).

The partnership should reflect the integrated territorial approach to regional development which requires multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral partnerships.

- ✓ All partners have to be involved in a way that demonstrates the joint implementation and transnational added value of the project;
- ✓ Partners should demonstrate complementary expertise and seek to provide a balanced relevant representation in terms of: MS, governance levels (European, national, regional and local), and sectors (e.g., public, private and third sector).

#### 4. Management system

Management procedures and structures should fit the financial size of the project and the number of partners. An efficient and effective involvement of all partners is crucial.

Procedures should be clearly set up outlining rights, duties of partners and Lead Partner, tools available, and should incorporate a risk management plan in order to mitigate any risks to achieve their goals. The Lead Partner must have previous experience in managing EU-funded or similar projects and set up a sound internal communication system within the partnership.

A principle of good project management is the monitoring of its implementation processes and results. Ongoing evaluations (either internal or external as part of project management) must be integrated into the action plan in such a way that lessons learnt and recommendations can be applied during the project's lifetime.

**It is considered crucial that the project must have proper risk and quality management systems in place**

#### 5. Communication of outcomes

Targeted and tailored communication will help projects to achieve aims and ensure transparency of the use of the EU funds. Communication activities are an important and integral part of the project implementation and require thorough planning as well as adequate resources.

From the application phase projects are expected to demonstrate how communication contributes to the success of the project.

Projects will have to prepare a communication plan which must reflect the strategic approach in relation to the activities, outputs, target audiences and partners' responsibilities for each work package.

When drafting the communication plan and actions, applicants will need to ensure consistency with the project objectives, proposed work plan and the main outputs and results.

Dissemination: to increase the impact of projects, all of them must include a result/outcome dissemination plan targeting project wider stakeholders/the relevant public in the participating regions.

**The relevant target groups and stakeholders must be reached and shall be informed of the project outputs and results**

## 6. Budget and value for money

The project should be adequately funded to properly implement its activities, and to effectively achieve its outputs and results. Value for money needs to be assured throughout the duration of the project. The budget must clearly show the relationship between resources employed and outputs delivered in terms of quantity, quality and timing, aiming to achieve objectives and results. Note that the project budget has to be used in accordance with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The budget per partner must be adequate to the work they have to carry out. The resources needed by each organisation for its activities should be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality and at the best price.

**Economy and efficiency concerns minimising the cost and getting the most from the available resources. Effectiveness meets the objectives and achieves the results.**

## 7. Work plan

The distribution of tasks among the partners should be appropriate and reasonable in view of partners' experience, budget, etc. The timetable should be realistic and take into account potential contingencies. The proposed activities are relevant and will lead to delivery of planned outputs and results. Further information in Section 2.7

## 8. Projects' sustainability

The Atlantic Area Programme will finance projects that deliver measurable outputs, generate tangible outcomes and provide opportunities to deliver lasting results. Projects should, therefore, demonstrate the potential of the proposed operation to continue activity beyond the lifetime of the programme, thereby capitalising on long-term benefits and maximising territorial impact.

Three dimensions of sustainability can be considered:

- ✓ **Financial sustainability:** Financing resources for follow-up activities and investments or for covering future operating and maintenance costs will be available?
- ✓ **Institutional sustainability:** What structures will allow the results of the project to continue to be in place after the project end? And how?
- ✓ **Political sustainability:** What structural impact will the project have? Will it lead to improved policies, legislation, plans, codes of conduct, methods, etc.?

## 9. Project innovation

Innovation is a cross-cutting theme but also a Priority Axis of the programme. It is also considered as one of the most important driving forces for regional and economic development. It can be described as a process through which knowledge is created and translated into new products, services or processes of the private and the public sector. Innovation is conceived in a variety of contexts, such as technology, economy, social systems, policy development etc. and can be process-oriented, goal-oriented or context-oriented. Innovation should be a key driver of Atlantic Area projects.

The Atlantic Area will play a role in the intermediate stages of the innovation chain that goes from fundamental research, to the commercialisation of a product or service, or the application of a new process. Projects should focus on applied research and include a testing or implementation phase, while commercialisation should be left to the market.

Ensure you keep up to date with recent developments and results achieved in your project's sector or field and build on these within your project. Make sure you explain in the application form why the project requires transnational cooperation to take the sector or field forward.

## 10. Indicators

The programme indicators system will allow projects to demonstrate their achievements towards the project and programme objectives both in terms of outputs (how much and how well did the project do?) and results (is anyone better off and has anything improved?).

Information on the programme indicators system is in Annex VI of the Cooperation Programme and in Annex II of this manual. Projects will be asked to quantify their inputs, activities and outputs in the application form.

## 11. Capitalisation

Experience shows that projects do not necessarily start from scratch but take into account lessons learnt or research from previous projects at regional/national or European levels, demonstrating their added value.

Projects are, therefore, encouraged to build on previous experiences. For a number of specific objectives in the Cooperation Programme, the aim is indeed to implement or apply existing solutions by optimising, adapting or improving them.

Note that duplication of activities carried out by other projects or programmes will not be supported.

## 2.3. Partnership (Principles, types, roles, size, geographical eligibility)

### 2.3.1 General principles

As a general rule, all the partners should contribute to an efficient implementation of the project and the scope and size of the partnership should reflect its objectives.

All partners should have the capacity and knowledge in the project subject area to participate fully and to contribute to deliver the intended products and/or services.

The quality of a partnership's composition is also related to the relative involvement of its different partners. Projects should ensure a balanced participation from their partners drawing on their specific relevant expertise.

In the Atlantic Area Programme, projects must bring together partners from at least three different countries of the cooperation area.

### 2.3.2 Types of partners

Partners participating in projects and receiving funding from the Atlantic Area Programme must belong to one of the following categories:

- A. National, regional, or local public bodies;
- B. Education and research institutions;
- C. Not-for-profit organisations;
- D. Private companies;
- E. International, transnational and cross-border organisations.

Categories	Examples
A. National, regional, or local public bodies	Local public authority: Municipality, etc.
	Regional public authority: Regional council, etc.
	National public authority: Ministry, State Agencies etc.
	Sectoral agency: Local or regional development agency, environmental agency, energy agency, employment agency, etc.
	Infrastructure and (public) service provider: public transport, utility company (water supply, electricity supply, sewage, gas, waste collection, etc.), airport, port, railway, etc.
B. Education and research institutions	Higher education and research: university faculty, college, research institution, RTD facility, research cluster, etc.
	Education/training centre and school : Primary, secondary, pre-school, vocational training and education, etc.



Categories	Examples
C. Not-for-profit organisations	Interest groups: NGO, trade union, foundation, charity, voluntary association, club, etc.
	Not for profit organizations: voluntary sector, charity organizations, cooperatives, etc.
	Business support organisations: chamber of commerce, chamber of trade and crafts, business incubator or innovation centre, business clusters, etc.
D. Private companies	Micro, small, medium sized enterprises
F. International, transnational and cross-border organisations	EEIG (European Economic Interest Grouping), EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), Duero-Douro EGTC; etc.
	International organisation under national law, under international law

**Bodies governed by public law** (as defined in Article 2.1(4) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement) are eligible partners under category “A” above if they comply with all the following criteria:

- ✓ They are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;
- ✓ They have legal personality;
- ✓ They are financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.

**Private sector partners** including profit-making partners (e.g., Small and Medium Enterprises - SMEs) can participate in the Atlantic Area Programme. However, only not-for-profit private partners (this means that the entire business is not-for-profit and not only the aspect relating to the project delivery) can be Lead Partners.

Economic activities performed by the partners influence the State aid relevance of the project. If the project activities are regarded as State aid relevant, additional restrictions (lower co-financing rate, ceiling of ERDF contribution, etc.) might be applied (for more information see Chapter 4).

Private sector partners should also be aware that:

- ✓ They will have to follow public procurement principles (transparency, non-discrimination and equal treatment);
- ✓ There may be some restrictions on retaining Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). See Chapter 6;

- ✓ In order to be reimbursed, costs will need to comply with the eligibility rules set out in Chapter 4;
- ✓ Participating partners cannot act as external experts to other partners in the same project;
- ✓ Cash flow issues may arise from lengthy payment procedures due to possible controls, audits legal proceedings, etc. In such cases, partners (and not only private ones) should consider higher liquidity levels;
- ✓ They will undergo a solvency check before the approval of the application in Stage 2. Potential (lead) partners are asked to inform the NC and/or CP of the concerned country, as soon as it becomes clear that a private partner might join the partnership. See Chapter 4;
- ✓ Not-for-profit organisations acting as Lead Partners must comply with minimum criteria of financial capacity, as described in Chapter 4.

Please note that private consultancy and/or management organisations, services suppliers, etc. whose main scope of activities, as well as their project role, consists of solely project coordination, management, communication, knowledge management or other activities that are of a mere executive or supporting character (service providers) cannot be involved as project partners. Compliance with this requirement will be checked during the quality assessment of project proposals which, on a case-by-case basis, could lead to the exclusion of such partners.

**International organisations** acting under international law can participate in projects only upon their explicit acceptance of all requirements deriving from the Treaty<sup>2</sup> and the regulations applicable in the framework of the Atlantic Area Programme, including - but not limited to - the following:

- ✓ Adherence to applicable Community policies, including the respect of rules on public procurement;
- ✓ Acceptance of controls and audits by all those bodies entitled to carry out such controls in the framework of the Atlantic Area Programme, including the MA and JS, the AA and the European Court of Auditors as well as the relevant national authorities of the MS in which the international organisation acting as project partner is located;
- ✓ To ensure access to all documents required for audits purposes, which must be stored within the geographical area covered by the Atlantic Area Programme;
- ✓ Final financial liability for all sums wrongly paid out.

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<sup>2</sup> Treaty for the Functioning of the EU, available on <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT> .

### 2.3.3 Partners roles

#### Lead Partner

The “Lead Partner principle” applies to the Atlantic Area Programme, in compliance with Article 13 of Regulation (EU) 1299/2013. The partnership appoints one organisation to act as Lead Partner. The Lead Partner takes **full financial and legal responsibility** for the implementation of the entire project.

Lead partner organisations can be public bodies, universities, education and research organisations, private institutions (not-for profit) and international organisations acting under national law.

The Lead Partner must be located in the programme area (see 2.3.5 Geographical location of partners).

It is the responsibility of the Lead Partner:

- ✓ To submit the **application form**;
- ✓ To sign a **Subsidy Contract** with the MA (CCDR-N) defining the responsibilities of the Lead Partner. This must be done within one month (indicative) following the notification of PMC approval by the JS to the Lead Partner;
- ✓ To establish the **Partnership Agreement** defining the partners’ mutual responsibilities between project partners;
- ✓ To coordinate **the project** during the implementation phase and to ensure sound financial and project management. This includes submission of progress reports and financial claims of eligible expenditure, as required by the programme;
- ✓ To maintain a **good communication flow in the partnership** to enable the successful delivery of the project outputs;
- ✓ To ensure sound **communication with the programme bodies**, especially with the JS.

Before signing the Subsidy Contract Not-for-profit private organisations acting as Lead Partner will be asked to provide proofs of their **financial solvency**.

#### Project partners

Project partners are the institutions or organisations actively and directly involved in the delivery of the project and providing their own financial contribution.

Project partners have the following tasks:

- ✓ Undertaking the actions and contributing to the activities foreseen in the application form;

- ✓ Delivering project outputs planned in the application form and agreed in the Partnership Agreement;
- ✓ Ensuring the durability of the main outputs and results;
- ✓ Assuming responsibility for any irregularity in the expenditure claimed;
- ✓ Contributing to the delivery of the progress reports;
- ✓ Carrying out information and communication activities in line with the communication plan and the programme's publicity requirements.

### **Associated partners**

Associated partners are organisations acting as observers, having no right to ERDF, or acting as external financiers, providing co-financing without any concrete participation in the implementation of project activities.

#### ***2.3.4 Size and balance of the partnership***

The partnership must **involve at least three partners who must be located within three different Atlantic Area Programme regions of three different MS.**

Whilst there are no formal upper limits to the number of partners, the number of partners depends on the key challenge and impact the project wants to achieve to support the objectives of the programme. The size of the partnership should reflect an optimum capacity to deliver its objectives, a balanced distribution of roles and funding among partners, and cover the various countries of the Atlantic Area. Therefore, the size of the partnership is flexible and should reflect the scope of the project while remaining manageable; as this has a direct impact on the efficiency of project implementation, particularly in terms of reporting and financial management where large amounts of information will need to be collected.

It must be emphasized that a large partnership requires adequate resources for its management; as it can affect project costs, in addition communication activities among partners may be more difficult to organise and may have an impact on the stability of the project. As a point of reference in the 2007-2013, Atlantic Area Programme the average partnership size was nine partners.

#### ***2.3.5 Geographical location of partners***

Project partners must be located within the eligible territory of the Atlantic Area regions.

However, 20% of overall programme funding may be used for partners outside the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme area. In duly justified cases, organisations based outside the cooperation area in the EU or in EFTA states may join project partnerships of the Programme, if the benefit for regions in the cooperation area is clearly demonstrated, through:

- ✓ Additional expertise that cannot be found within the programme area;
- ✓ Justification on the need to involve a partner outside the programme area;
- ✓ Clear benefits to be achieved on the involvement of partners outside of the programme area.

### **Lead Partners must be located within the programme area.**

Partners from a MS outside the Atlantic Area are only allowed to participate once an agreement between the MA and the organisation based in the country of the partner is signed, ensuring that relevant management control procedures can be implemented in that country.

The MA is responsible for drafting, approving and obtaining the relevant signatures on the agreement, which must happen prior to the signing of the Subsidy Contract with the Lead Partner.

The MA is responsible for monitoring the ERDF allocation outside the eligible programme area which may not exceed 20 % of the total ERDF programme contribution, pursuant to Article 20 of Regulation (EU) N° 1299/2013 - ETC.

Should the activities to be carried out by partners located in a MS outside the programme area be considered as State aid relevant, the participation of these partners will not be allowed due to the impossibility for the programme PMC to validate the result of the State aid assessment on behalf of a MS not participating in the programme.

### ***2.3.6 Geographical location of activities***

In line with the requirements for the geographical location of partners, and as a basic principle, the Atlantic Area Programme supports project activities taking place in the programme area. This principle applies both to Lead Partners and partners, core project activities must, therefore, be implemented in the regions of the programme area, with the exception of the necessary management activities.

However, up to 20% of the programme funding may be dedicated to activities outside the programme area in the EU or third countries, including the participation in missions, study visits and events – which can exceptionally be accepted in duly justified cases. For such activities all the following requirements must be respected:

1. The activities are for the benefit of the programme area;
2. The activities are essential for project implementation;
3. The activities are outlined in the application form or, if not, have previously been authorised by the MA/JS.

## 2.4. Budget size and funding

There is no pre-established lower or upper limit to project budgets; as a general indication, the average total approved amount per project in the 2007-2013 Atlantic Area Programme was EUR 2 300 000. Budgets must be commensurate with the activities and the number or partners, while evidencing value for money.

Partners must ensure that the project budget adequately reflects the activities foreseen in the work plan and that it is based on the principles of sound financial management.

To ensure that operations have a robust transnational feature, a strong and balanced coverage of partners and funding over the different countries of the entire programme area must be sought by projects.

Expenditure is considered eligible if it complies with EU, national and programme rules and the established legal limits, if it is directly related to the project, respects the principles of economic efficiency and cost-effectiveness and if it is incurred in the eligibility period of the programme. Further details provided in Chapter 4.

## 2.5. Project duration

The average project duration is between **18 and 36 months**. However, if justified by the project scope and the planned activities, a longer implementation period up to maximum 48 months could be acceptable. When preparing the work plan calendar and the project duration, applicants must take into account the time period for both the project set up and project closure, which will consist of a couple of months.

## 2.6. Project co-financing

The Atlantic Area Programme is financed by the ERDF. Regardless of partner's location, the co-financing rate is up to 75% of eligible project costs.

ERDF contribution to project Lead Partner and partners might be reduced following the application of State aid rules. For further information, please see Chapter 4.

The match funding shall be guaranteed by each project Lead Partner and partners by means of co-financing, which can be provided as follows:

- 1. Public co-financing** - public funding at national, regional or local level, obtained *via* specific co-financing schemes set up by the MS or provided directly with own funds by the partners having a public status. Co-financing of international organisations also falls under this category.
- 2. Private co-financing** - the amount of own funds provided as match funding by private institutions.

## 2.7. Work plan organisation

The project follows a work plan that consists of a set of work packages. Each work package will be broken down into identified activities linked to deliverables, i.e. a product or service that contributes to the development of the project's main output.

The main outputs must clearly contribute to the programme's output indicators, which the project must select in the application form.

A project can have a maximum of 8 work packages, and must include the 3 mandatory packages listed below:

1. Project management;
2. Communication;
3. Capitalization.

The project can then design up to 5 thematic work packages, the titles of which decided by the partnership.

An additional work package can be dedicated to project preparation (Work Package - WP 0).

For each work package, one of the project partners will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the related activities.

The project may include some capital investments if they are necessary, particularly as pilot or demonstration actions to deliver the project's objectives. However, the Atlantic Area Programme is not primarily an infrastructure investment programme, therefore, investments are limited in terms of size and budget and must be thematically specific. This information will have to be communicated to the programme by project approved during the contractualisation and have to be validated by the PMC.

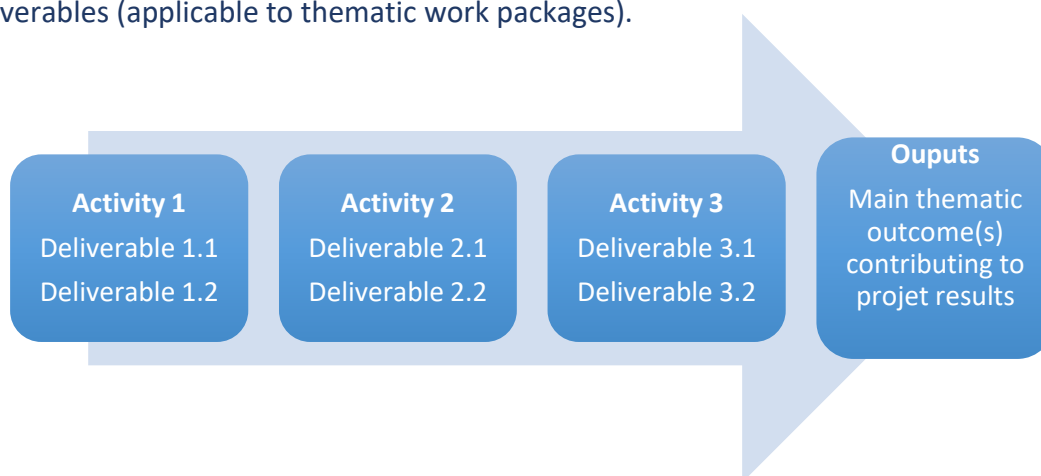
For detailed information, see Chapter 3 "Applying for Atlantic Area Projects" below.

### 2.7.1 Work plan and packages

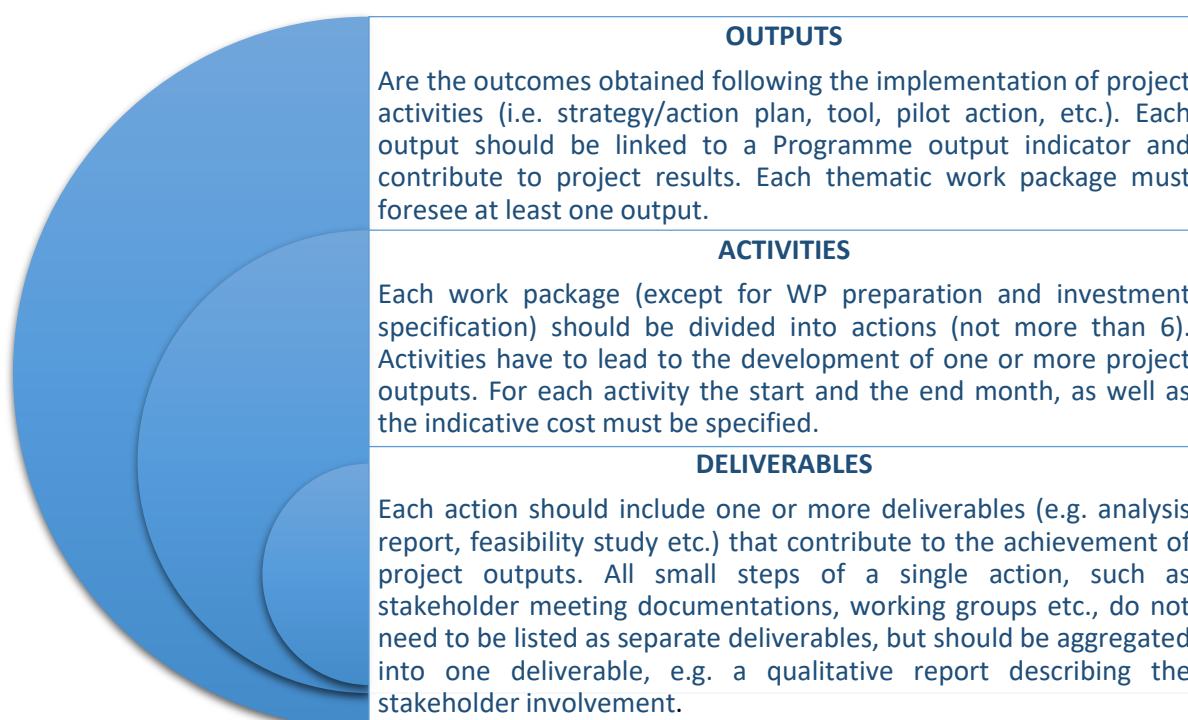
Work packages include several aspects and are structured according to:

- ✓ Objective;
- ✓ Definition of partners roles and responsibilities;
- ✓ A set of activities and actions (no more than 6 actions per work package);
- ✓ Deliver one output at least (for thematic work packages only);
- ✓ A start and an end date.

The following figure illustrates the relationship between project activities, outputs and deliverables (applicable to thematic work packages).



### 2.7.2 Outputs, activities and deliverables





### 2.7.3 Types of outputs

The Atlantic Area Programme has pre-defined five categories of project outputs which put emphasis on policy support and implementation-oriented approaches:

- ✓ Case studies and pilot actions;
- ✓ Technical and scientific publications;
- ✓ Policy, strategy and operational instruments;
- ✓ Dissemination actions and capitalisation of results;
- ✓ Participants in actions for the dissemination and results capitalisation.

For each programme specific objective a set of other programme output indicators has been established. In order to provide project applicants with practical guidance and a common understanding of the definition of output indicators, more detailed information is provided in Annex VI of the Cooperation Programme and in Annex II of this manual.

Project output must be quantified. Each thematic work package must have at least one output. Nevertheless, a work package can contain several outputs of the same type (e.g., 7 pilot actions in 7 different regions participating in a project).

Attention should be paid to how outputs can be used by the target groups addressed, as well as to their durability and transferability in order to achieve the intended results.

In this context the main targets groups for the work package outputs have to be chosen from a list of pre-defined target groups. It should be also described how those target groups and other stakeholders will be involved in the development of the foreseen outputs.

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## Abbreviations used in the Programme Manual

AA	Audit Authority
AD&C	Agência para o Desenvolvimento e Coesão
CA	Certifying Authority
CCDR-N	Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Norte
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
EOI	Expression of Interest
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
FLC	First Level Controller
GBER	General Block Exemption Regulation
GoA	Group of Auditors
IGF	Inspeção Geral de Finanças
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MS	Member State
NC	National Correspondents
NCP	National Contact Points
PAF	Project Approved Form
PMC	Programme Monitoring Committee
SIGI	Integrated management information system
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
WP	Work Package