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Interreg Aurora

Evaluation of the programme's achieved results, progress towards objectives, and contribution to administrative learning

Interreg

Aurora



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Executive Summary

This report presents the evaluation of the Interreg Aurora Programme 2021–2027, commissioned by the Interreg Aurora Programme Monitoring Committee and conducted on behalf of the Programme’s Managing Authority, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten. The evaluation assesses the programme’s design and implementation up to March 2026, with a particular focus on relevance, coherence, effectiveness and Union added value, and with specific attention to the programme’s territorially differentiated set-up, including Sápmi as a distinct sub-area.

The evaluation applies a mixed-methods approach, combining programme monitoring and financial data, systematic document analysis and targeted interviews, complemented by evidence from the interim evaluation phase (autumn 2025). Given that a large share of operations is still ongoing, findings on results and long-term effects are framed cautiously and focus on early delivery signals, plausibility of result pathways and implementation performance.

Key findings are summarised below.

- **High relevance and strategic importance.** Interreg Aurora is widely perceived as a strategically important instrument for addressing structural challenges linked to sparsity, distance and cross-border functional interdependencies. The programme is well aligned with EU Cohesion Policy objectives and the EU Arctic policy agenda.
- **Strong internal coherence.** There is a clear link between the programme’s overall objective, priorities, specific objectives, indicators and funded operations. The portfolio demonstrates thematic concentration and a coherent intervention logic.
- **Satisfactory early effectiveness, with uneven performance signals.** The pace of project selection and financial implementation is consistent taking into account the stage of programme implementation, and output mobilisation is strong in several objectives. At the same time, delivery is uneven across objectives, with slower progress in parts of Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition).
- **Sustainable mobility is a critical risk area.** Sustainable mobility (SO 2.3) shows weak pipeline mobilisation (low indicator coverage and limited financial allocation covered by selected operations), which reduces the plausibility of achieving targets and downstream results unless corrective measures are taken.
- **Strong Union added value and cross-border value added.** Projects consistently demonstrate added value through joint knowledge production, pooling of

critical mass and the establishment of durable cooperation structures. Cross-border cooperation is a core delivery mechanism rather than an administrative requirement.

- **Participation barriers persist for smaller actors.** Administrative complexity—partly driven by EU regulatory requirements—co-financing requirements and language constraints continue to limit participation by smaller organisations and Sámi actors. While the question of who can reduce the administrative burden spans several governance levels, the programme administration has introduced mitigation measures, including Simplified Cost Options (SCOs), to facilitate participation by beneficiaries.
- **Results and long-term effects are mainly prospective at this stage.** Many operations generate knowledge, pilots and preparatory work that require follow-up, institutional anchoring and uptake mechanisms to translate outputs into durable results. Sustainability remains a cross-cutting challenge.

Findings for the sub-area Sápmi. The Sápmi portfolio is strategically focused and internally coherent, with strong alignment to needs related to language revitalisation, culture, education and societal capacity building. At this stage, effectiveness is best assessed in terms of strategic direction and coherence; many projects are long-term and institutional in nature, limiting the available evidence on impacts.

Main recommendations are set out in Chapter 9. In summary, the evaluation recommends that the programme organisation:

- **Strengthens active portfolio management** to consolidate priority result pathways and safeguard critical mass, using calls, selection criteria and follow-up not only for compliance but also for strategic steering.
- **Addresses the weak pipeline in sustainable mobility (SO 2.3)** through targeted mobilisation measures (e.g. focused calls, partner matchmaking and clearer signalling of expected result pathways).
- **Reinforces sustainability mechanisms** by securing exit strategies and follow-up arrangements, and by supporting uptake, continuation and scaling of jointly developed solutions beyond project closure.
- **Broadens participation while maintaining delivery efficiency**, by lowering barriers for smaller actors—recognising that EU regulatory requirements, state aid rules, and limited administrative and financial capacity are common constraints—and encouraging a wider mix of partners (including private enterprises and new entrants) without creating overly complex consortia.

- **Maintains and clarifies the distinct strategic logic for sub-area Sápmi** and strengthens monitoring of qualitative and long-term outcomes that are central to Sámi language, culture and institutional capacity building.

The remainder of the report provides the supporting evidence base and analysis underpinning these findings and recommendations, including an assessment of economic and financial performance, indicator mobilisation, portfolio composition, partnership patterns, and an in-depth analysis of results and effects from twelve completed operations.

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1. Introduction

This evaluation concerns the Interreg Aurora Programme 2021–2027 and is commissioned by the Programme’s Monitoring Committee. It is carried out on behalf of the Programme’s Managing Authority, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, which has been mandated by the Monitoring Committee to procure and oversee the evaluation. Interreg Aurora is an EU-funded cross-border cooperation programme covering northern Sweden, northern Finland, northern Norway and Sápmi. The programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness of the programme area through social inclusion, digitalisation and the green transition.

1.1 The evaluation

The evaluation is conducted in accordance with Article 35(1) of the Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 and its overarching objective is to improve the quality of the programme’s design and implementation. It seeks to generate increased knowledge on how the programme strategically contributes to addressing the key challenges facing the Interreg Aurora programme area, and to assess whether the programme is on track to achieve its overall objective as well as the specific objectives under each priority.

The evaluation examines the programme’s relevance, effectiveness, coherence and Union added value, and analyses its contribution to long-term effects, results and cross-border value added. It further aims to identify strengths, areas for improvement and any need for adjustments in the programme’s implementation. Based on the analysis, the evaluation provides evidence-based recommendations to support the further development of the programme and its projects during the ongoing programming period as well as in preparation for future periods.

The evaluation is guided by the following evaluation questions:

1. How do the countries and regions within the programme area perceive cross-border cooperation programmes from a strategic perspective?
2. How relevant is the programme for the countries and regions concerned?
3. What long-term effects does the Interreg programme contribute to within the programme area?
4. What results do projects generate, how do these relate to the programme’s overall objective, and how do they contribute to the added value of a cross-border programme?

5. Are there objectives and/or results that have not yet been achieved?
6. Which existing and emerging partnerships can be identified, and are there potential partnerships that remain missing?
7. How successfully has the programme reached potential beneficiaries in both the sub-area Aurora and the sub-area Sápmi?
8. How does the programme contribute to the main objectives of the EU's Arctic policy (climate action, sustainable development, environmental protection and international cooperation)?

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation applies a mixed-methods and triangulated approach, combining quantitative programme data, qualitative document analysis and targeted interviews to assess the design, implementation and early performance of the Interreg Aurora Programme 2021–2027. The methodological design follows the European Commission's evaluation framework¹ and addresses the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, Union added value, cross-border value added and contribution to long-term effects and results.

Given the position of the programming period and the high share of ongoing operations, the evaluation places primary emphasis on strategic alignment, implementation performance and plausibility of future results, rather than on ex post impact assessment. Conclusions regarding results and effects are therefore framed with appropriate caution and temporal awareness.

1.2.1 Data sources

The evaluation draws on the following main data sources:

1. **Programme monitoring and financial data**
Quantitative data on approved operations, financial allocation, commitments, payments, output indicators and result indicators were extracted from the EU Cohesion Database and the national project database maintained by The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket), with a data cut-off in March 2026. These data form the basis for the analysis of portfolio composition, financial implementation, indicator mobilisation and completion patterns.
2. **Document and reporting analysis**
The evaluation includes systematic review of programme documents, project

¹ [European Commission \(2023\). Better regulation toolbox](#)

decisions, final reports from completed operations, progress reporting and publicly available programme material, including the programme's Results news. Document analysis is used to assess intervention logic, alignment between objectives and operations, reported outputs and stated goal achievement.

3. **Qualitative interviews and consultations**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during February and March 2026 with project representatives from a selected set of completed operations. Interviews were used to complement documentary evidence by providing qualitative insights on results, effects, sustainability, partnership functioning and delivery constraints. Interview material is explicitly used to confirm, nuance or qualify documentary findings, particularly where quantitative indicators are insufficient to capture qualitative or long-term contributions.

4. **Survey and stakeholder consultations (interim phase reference)**

Findings from the interim evaluation phase (autumn 2025), including survey data from project leaders and consultations with programme authorities and key stakeholders, are used as contextual reference points to support longitudinal interpretation and consistency over time.

1.2.2 Portfolio and indicator analysis

The portfolio analysis covers all approved operations at the time of data extraction and examines:

- distribution across policy objectives, priorities and specific objectives,
- thematic concentration and balance,
- lead partner and partnership patterns,
- country participation, including the role of Norwegian partners,
- financial allocation and implementation progress,
- completion status and timing.

Indicator analysis focuses on output indicator mobilisation as a proxy for early effectiveness, recognising that result indicators typically mature later in the intervention chain. Where output targets are already covered or exceeded by selected operations, the analysis interprets this as strong upstream mobilisation. Conversely, objectives with weak indicator coverage are treated as structural risk areas for future effectiveness.

For completed operations, the evaluation assesses reporting coverage (expected achievements, actual achievements and project outputs) rather than calculating aggregate achievement rates, as the available datasets do not allow systematic comparison between planned and realised results at this stage.

1.2.3 In-depth analysis of completed operations

A subset of **twelve completed operations** was selected for in-depth qualitative analysis. Selection was guided by the aim to reflect diversity across policy objectives, thematic areas, partnership models and result pathways, rather than statistical representativeness.

For each operation, the analysis synthesises evidence from:

- final reporting and documented outputs,
- interview material.

The in-depth analysis examines:

- target groups,
- partnership structures,
- types of results produced,
- reported goal achievement,
- plausible pathways to effects and longer-term impact,
- key risks related to sustainability, scaling and uptake.

Differences between project types such as service-oriented projects, research and innovation projects, and community-based learning or cultural projects are explicitly acknowledged and interpreted as reflecting different intervention logics and time horizons.

1.2.4 Treatment of Sápmi as a distinct sub-area

The evaluation applies a territorially differentiated analytical approach, treating Sápmi as a distinct sub-area within the programme. Analysis of the Sápmi portfolio focuses on strategic alignment, thematic coherence and appropriateness in relation to identified Sámi needs, rather than on short-term quantitative outcomes. Given the long-term, institutional and capacity-building nature of many Sápmi projects, effectiveness is assessed primarily in terms of strategic direction and intervention logic.

1.2.5 Limitations

The evaluation is subject to several methodological limitations inherent to the stage of programme implementation:

- A large share of operations is still ongoing, limiting observable evidence on results and impacts.
- Reporting data for completed operations show uneven population of expected and actual achievement fields, constraining systematic comparison between planned and realised results.
- Evidence from completed operations is currently concentrated in objectives with shorter delivery cycles, which may bias early performance signals.

These limitations are explicitly reflected in the interpretation of findings and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

1.3 Report structure and reading guide

This report is structured to provide a progressive evidence base, moving from programme context and portfolio facts to analytical interpretation and recommendations.

- **Chapter 1** introduces the assignment, evaluation scope, methods and key messages from the interim report presented in October 2025.
- **Chapter 2** sets out the programme's economic and financial performance and contextualises findings against the mid-term stage of the programming period.
- **Chapter 3** reviews output and result indicator performance to assess early mobilisation, highlight risks and interpret what can (and cannot) be concluded on results at this stage (including the underperformance spotlight on sustainable mobility, SO 2.3).
- **Chapter 4** presents the scope and composition of the portfolio and synthesises evidence on completed operations and emerging results.
- **Chapter 5** profiles main project actors and lead-partner patterns, supporting interpretation of delivery capacity and participation dynamics.
- **Chapter 6** analyses partnership patterns, Union added value and efficiency considerations, with attention to cross-border value added and potential participation asymmetries.
- **Chapter 7** provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of a set of completed operations, drawing on final reporting and interviews to assess results, effects, target groups and goal achievement.
- **Chapter 8** focuses specifically on the Sápmi sub-area, assessing portfolio coherence, strategic contribution and prospects for objective achievement.

- **Chapter 9** consolidates conclusions against the evaluation criteria and presents recommendations for the programme's further implementation.

1.4 Key messages from the interim evaluation

This interim evaluation presented in autumn 2025 confirms that Interreg Aurora 2021–2027 is a highly relevant and strategically important programme for fostering cross-border cooperation, resilience and sustainable development in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway. The points below summarise the conclusions of the interim evaluation.

- **Overall, the programme** is on track in terms of relevance, coherence and Union added value. At the same time, the interim evaluation identifies areas where targeted adjustments and strengthened implementation measures may be required to maximise long-term impact and inclusiveness. These findings provide a key reference point for the final evaluation phase, which will assess effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability based on additional evidence from completed operations.
- **High relevance and strategic importance:** The interim evaluation confirms that Interreg Aurora 2021–2027 is highly relevant and strategically important for promoting cross-border cooperation, resilience and sustainable development in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway.
- **Strong alignment with EU policy frameworks:** The programme is well aligned with EU Cohesion Policy objectives and EU Arctic policy priorities, effectively translating overarching policy ambitions into a coherent set of priorities, specific objectives and intervention fields.
- **Distinct territorial set-up with added value:** The dual geographical structure, covering both the Aurora area and the Sápmi sub-area, represents a distinctive programme feature and provides a unique framework for indigenous-led and cross-border cooperation.
- **Solid performance of the operations portfolio:** Based on an analysis of 146 approved operations (as of October 2025), a survey of operation leaders and consultations with key stakeholders, the interim findings indicate strong performance in terms of relevance, short-term effects and Union added value.
- **Balanced portfolio with thematic concentration:** The operations portfolio is broadly balanced across the four programme priorities, with a strong concentration on innovation, digitalisation and the green transition.
- **Clear Union added value from cooperation:** Projects consistently demonstrate high added value from cross-border cooperation, notably through mutual knowledge transfer, the establishment of collaborative structures and joint learning processes.

- **Programme funding as a decisive enabling factor:** Interreg Aurora support is widely perceived as decisive, as a substantial share of operations report that activities would have been delayed, scaled down or not implemented without programme funding.
- **Uncertainty regarding long-term sustainability and impacts:** While short- and medium-term effects are strong, long-term sustainability and operational impacts remain uncertain, highlighting the need for reinforced exit strategies, follow-up mechanisms and stronger institutional anchoring.
- **Persistent structural barriers to participation:** Administrative complexity, co-financing requirements and language constraints continue to limit participation by smaller actors and Sámi organisations, despite targeted mitigation measures by the Managing Authority.

2. The programme's economic performance

This chapter provides the economic and financial context for the evaluation's analytical conclusions and recommendations. The data is based on programme statistics collected at Cohesion Database in March 2026.

Interreg Aurora shows a financial implementation profile that is consistent with the mid-term stage of the programming period. A substantial share of the planned budget has been committed through approved projects, while expenditure and EU reimbursements are increasing as projects move from start-up to active implementation.

The analysis of EU payment flows indicates a transition from pre-financing towards interim payments, reflecting a maturing project portfolio and progressing financial absorption. The programme's payment trajectory follows an expected pattern for Interreg programmes and is broadly in line with, and in some periods slightly above, the EU average for comparable programmes. At the same time, the cumulative payment level confirms that a large share of projects remains ongoing, implying that results and impacts are still unfolding.

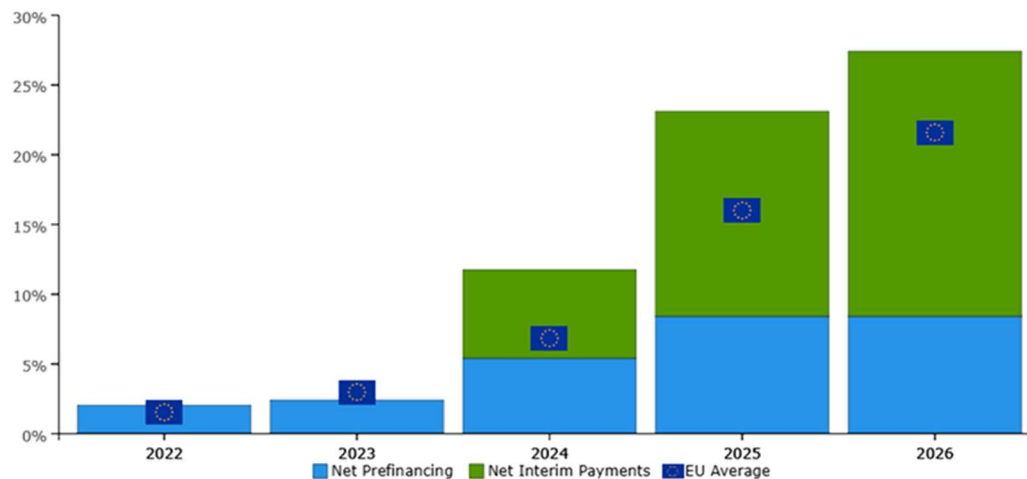
In parallel, the allocation of funding across programme priorities demonstrates a clear financial concentration on smart growth and the green transition, complemented by targeted investments in social and governance-related areas. This distribution is broadly consistent with the programme's strategic ambitions, while also highlighting where financial emphasis is strongest within the intervention logic.

Taken together, the chapter establishes that Interreg Aurora is progressing along a sound and expected financial implementation path. It provides essential context for the subsequent analytical conclusions and recommendations, underlining that assessments at this stage should primarily focus on relevance, strategic alignment and implementation performance, while long-term impact must be interpreted with caution and revisited later in the programming period.

2.1 The pace of financial implementation

Fel! Hittar inte referenskölla. illustrates the cumulative evolution of EU payments to the Interreg Aurora programme over the period 2022–2026, expressed as a share of the planned EU allocation. It distinguishes between net pre-financing and net interim payments, thereby providing an overview of both the initial liquidity provided to the programme and the subsequent reimbursement of declared eligible expenditure.

Figure 1. The cumulative evolution of EU payments to the Interreg Aurora programme, 2022-2026.



Source: Cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu, March 2026.

The observed payment profile reflects a typical implementation trajectory for Interreg programmes. In the early years of the programming period, EU payments are dominated by pre-financing, while interim payments remain limited. From 2024 onwards, the figure shows a clear acceleration in cumulative payments, driven primarily by an increase in interim payments. This shift indicates that a growing number of projects have moved from start-up and planning phases into active implementation, with eligible costs being incurred, reported and reimbursed.

By 2025 and 2026, interim payments constitute the largest share of cumulative EU payments, signalling a maturing project portfolio and an increasing absorption of EU funds. The programme’s trajectory appears broadly in line with, and in some years slightly above, the EU average for comparable programmes, suggesting a satisfactory pace of financial implementation relative to the stage of the programming period.

From an evaluation perspective, the figure should be interpreted as evidence of progressing financial implementation rather than as a measure of programme effectiveness or impact. The increasing volume of interim payments demonstrates that projects are being implemented as planned and that the programme is transitioning from commitment to execution. At the same time, the cumulative payment level confirms that a substantial share of the programme is still ongoing, which has implications for the timing of results and impacts.

Overall, the figure supports the conclusion that Interreg Aurora is following an expected and broadly sound financial implementation path. It provides important contextual information for the evaluation, indicating that assessments at this stage are best focused on relevance, strategic alignment and implementation progress, while conclusions on results and

impacts should be approached with caution and revisited at a later stage of the programming period.

2.2 Allocation of Funding Across Programme Priorities

Overall, the resource allocation is broadly consistent with the programme's strategic ambitions, with the strongest financial concentration in smart growth and the green transition, complemented by social and governance-related interventions.

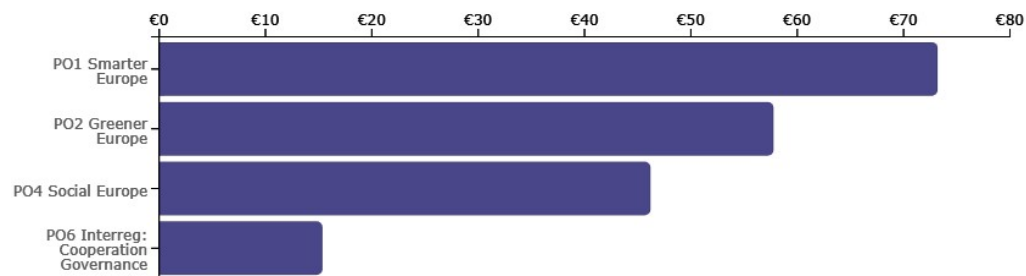
Figure 2 presents the distribution of allocated EU funding across the programme priorities. The figure shows that the largest share of funding is allocated to Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth). Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition) accounts for the second-largest share. A smaller, yet still substantial, share is allocated to Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism), while Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation) represents the smallest share of the total allocation.

This distribution indicates a portfolio with a clear financial emphasis on Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth) and Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition), complemented by investments under Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism) and Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation). This pattern is consistent with the programme's overarching objective of strengthening competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness through cross-border cooperation, with explicit reference to digitalisation, the green transition and social inclusion.

The allocation to Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism) forms a distinct, secondary area of investment. This indicates a meaningful financial commitment to social and inclusive dimensions—such as education, culture and sustainable tourism—while placing comparatively greater financial weight on innovation- and environment-oriented interventions under Priorities 1 and 2.

Finally, the comparatively smaller allocation to Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border operations) reflects the enabling role of governance and capacity-building interventions in the programme architecture. This priority strengthens cooperation structures, administrative capacity and implementation conditions across the programme, thereby supporting delivery of the thematic priorities rather than constituting a primary investment area in itself.

Figure 2. Allocation of funding across programme priorities.



Note: The figure’s y-axes show the policy objectives. Translated into Interreg Aurora’s priorities, this means: PO1 (Smarter Europe) = Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth), PO2 (Greener Europe) = Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition), PO3 (Social Europe) = Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism), and PO4 (Interreg: Cooperation Governance) = Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation).

Source: Cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu, March 2026.

3. The programme’s output and result performance

This chapter sets out an analysis of the programme’s intervention logic and early performance through the lens of output and result indicators, providing a structured basis for the subsequent analytical conclusions and recommendations. Interreg Aurora is structured around a clear hierarchy linking strategic ambitions to specific objectives, intervention fields and funded operations, thereby translating programme intent into measurable deliverables and expected achievements. The data is based on programme statistics collected at Cohesion Database in March 2026.

The analysis shows strong mobilisation across several specific objectives, with the selected project portfolio already sufficient—often more than sufficient—to meet 2029 output targets for many key indicators. This pattern indicates robust upstream performance and points towards recommendation areas related to consolidation, quality assurance and the translation of strong mobilisation into sustained results, rather than further acceleration of project selection in already well-covered objectives.

At the same time, the indicator snapshot highlights a pronounced thematic imbalance. Sustainable mobility (SO 2.3) emerges as a clear underperformer, with low indicator mobilisation and very limited financial coverage by selected operations. It should be noted, however, that the Managing Authority on the mandate of the Monitoring Committee and the Steering Committee has already undertaken several mobilisation measures to address weak

pipelines in selected specific objectives. Nonetheless, the current snapshot indicates a structural risk to target achievement and downstream results in this objective unless the project pipeline is significantly strengthened. The finding provides a direct basis for recommendations related to pipeline development, targeted calls and strategic rebalancing within the programme's objective structure.

Regarding results, the analysis confirms that uptake, continuation and scaling typically mature later in the intervention chain than outputs. At this stage, available programme data does not yet allow for a robust assessment of result delivery. Consequently, results performance is treated primarily as a forward-looking plausibility issue, closely linked to the strength of outputs, the presence of exit strategies and the institutional anchoring of project outcomes. This points towards recommendation needs concerning sustainability mechanisms, follow-up arrangements and post-project continuation pathways.

From an evaluation perspective, the programme demonstrates high relevance and an appropriate level of early effectiveness. The link between territorial needs, programme objectives and selected operations appears clear, and the implementation architecture supports active project selection and monitoring. However, the analysis also identifies risks related to thematic focus, delivery capacity and administrative load, which may affect the programme's ability to translate strong mobilisation into concentrated and timely results. These observations underpin recommendations related to strategic focus, delivery performance and administrative capacity over the remainder of the programming period.

Taken together, the chapter establishes that Interreg Aurora's intervention logic is functioning largely as intended, while also identifying a limited number of critical risk areas. This provides a clear and evidence-based point of departure for the following analytical conclusions and recommendations, particularly those addressing strategic concentration, pipeline strengthening, sustainability of results and effectiveness of implementation.

3.1 Strong mobilisation in several objectives

The programme snapshot in March 2026 indicates that, for multiple specific objectives, the selected portfolio already covers—often more than covers—the 2029 output targets in indicator terms. This is, however, a preliminary picture based on selected operations and gross indicator entries. In line with reporting requirements, each organisation will ultimately be counted only once per specific objective, and adjustments for double counting will be applied after operations are finalised, as it is the final, validated achievements that are reported to the Commission.

Under Priority 1 – Specific Objective 1.1, for example, selected operations exceed targets for:

- RCO07 research organisations participating in joint research (target 40; selected 149), and
- RCO10 enterprises cooperating with research organisations (target 57; selected 271).

Under Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.1 and Specific Objective 2.2, selected operations exceed targets for key cooperation and pilot indicators. By contrast, Specific Objective 2.3 (sustainable mobility) underperforms, with selected operations falling well below targets across multiple indicators (see Section 3.2).

- SO 2.1–2.2: RCO84 pilot actions (target 4; selected 23 in both objectives), and RCO87 organisations cooperating across borders (SO 2.1: target 30; selected 74; SO 2.2: target 36; selected 86).
- SO 2.3 (underperformance): RCO83 strategies/action plans (target 12; selected 1), RCO84 pilot actions (target 4; selected 0), RCO87 organisations cooperating (target 24; selected 10), and RCO116 jointly developed solutions (target 4; selected 0).

Under Priority 3, selected operations also exceed targets for key cooperation and pilot indicators. Under SO 3.1, RCO84 pilot actions exceed the target (target 4; selected 48) and RCO87 organisations cooperating exceed the target (target 18; selected 64). Under SO 3.2, RCO84 pilot actions exceed the target (target 15; selected 50) and RCO87 organisations cooperating exceed the target (target 58; selected 220).

Under Priority 4 – Specific Objective 4.1, selected operations also exceed targets: RCO117 solutions for legal or administrative obstacles across border identified (target 12; selected 22), RCO83 strategies and action plans jointly developed (target 20; selected 34), and RCO87 organisations cooperating across borders (target 50; selected 80).

In intervention-logic terms, this pattern indicates strong upstream performance: the programme has mobilised a portfolio that, if delivered as expected, is positioned to generate substantial cooperative outputs and practical deliverables (pilots and solutions) across several objectives. It should be noted, however, that the figures are based on gross entries and will require data cleaning within each specific objective: each organisation can be counted only once per specific objective, while the same organisation may legitimately be counted under more than one specific objective. Table 1 presents the target and selected values in terms of outcome indicators.

Table 1. Priorities/Specific objectives, RCO indicators, target and selected values for Interreg Aurora.

Priority / Specific Objective	RCO indicator	RCO indicator description	Measurement unit	Target value	Selected value
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.1	RCO07	Research organisations participating in joint research projects	research organisations	40	149
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.1	RCO10	Enterprises cooperating with research organisations	enterprises	57	271
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	26	116
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.2	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	15	26
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.2	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	13	26
Smart and sustainable growth SO 1.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	44	81
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	6	21
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.1	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	16	15
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot action	4	23
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.1	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	30	74
Green and sustainable	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	5	27

transition SO 2.2					
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.2	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	18	16
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot action	4	23
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	36	86
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.3	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	4	0
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.3	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	12	1
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.3	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot action	4	0
Green and sustainable transition SO 2.3	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	24	10
Education, culture and sustainable tourism SO 3.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot action	4	48
Education, culture and sustainable tourism SO 3.1	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	18	64
Education, culture and sustainable tourism SO 3.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot action	15	50

Educa-tion, cul-ture and sustaina-ble tour-ism SO 3.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	58	220
Better and more sus-tainable cross-border coop-eration SO 4.1	RCO117	Solutions for legal or administrative ob-stacles across border identified	solutions	12	22
Better and more sus-tainable cross-border coop-eration SO 4.1	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly devel-oped	strategy/act-ion plan	20	34
Better and more sus-tainable cross-border coop-eration SO 4.1	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	50	80

Source: Cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu, March 2026 and Interreg Aurora Programme Manual.

3.2 Underperformance spotlight: sustainable mobility

Sustainable mobility is the clearest and most policy-relevant underperformance signalled by the programme’s own reporting snapshot.

For Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3, selected operations fall markedly below targets across multiple output indicators:

- RCO83 strategies/action plans jointly developed: target 12; selected 1.
- RCO84 pilot actions: target 4; selected 0.
- RCO87 organisations cooperating: target 24; selected 10.
- RCO116 jointly developed solutions: target 4; selected 0.

Financial progress data in the same snapshot strengthens the underperformance signal: for Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3, the proportion of the objective’s allocation covered with selected operations is only 3.62 percent, with three selected operations recorded at the cut-off. This contrasts with substantially higher coverage rates for several other objectives in the same table.

The principal risk for Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3 is upstream: the portfolio pipeline is currently too thin, in both indicator and financial mobilisation terms, to make target achievement plausible without a material shift in project selection and/or a stronger pipeline in sustainable mobility activities. This interpretation aligns with internal interim evaluation findings that explicitly note sustainable mobility as an area needing greater emphasis.

3.3 Results and uptake: what can be concluded at this stage

Results (uptake, continuation and scaling) typically mature later in the intervention chain than outputs. Internal interim evaluation findings already flag that long-term sustainability requires reinforced exit strategies and follow-up mechanisms, which is directly relevant for result-type achievements such as post-project cooperation and uptake of solutions.

At this stage, the programme reporting snapshot used here does not provide a comparable, fully evidenced picture of results delivery in the same way it does for the selected-operations pipeline in outputs. Consequently, this chapter treats results performance primarily as a forward-looking risk and plausibility issue: where outputs are strong and sustainability mechanisms are reinforced, translation into results becomes more likely; where outputs are weak (as in Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3), the risk of weak results is structurally higher unless mobilisation improves. It should be noted that the Managing Authority—on the mandate of the Monitoring Committee—has undertaken a number of mobilisation measures to address pipeline gaps in selected specific objectives. While the March 2026 snapshot suggests that these measures have not yet translated into sufficient selected operations in the weakest areas, early signals from Call 8 indicate increased application volumes under Priority 2, which may strengthen the pipeline going forward.

3.4 Relevance and effectiveness of the programme based on indicator performance

This section assesses the relevance and effectiveness of Interreg Aurora in line with the European Commission’s evaluation framework, with particular attention to the programme’s intervention logic, early implementation performance and associated risks. The analysis draws on the observed composition of the project portfolio, the pace of project selection and early financial commitment, and the alignment between identified territorial needs, programme objectives and funded operations. While the programme demonstrates strong relevance and an active implementation dynamic at an early stage of the programming period, the assessment also highlights a set of potential risks related to strategic focus, result concentration and delivery capacity that are relevant for understanding future performance and sustainability of results.

3.4.1 Relevance

Based on the European Commission's evaluation logic, the relevance of Interreg Aurora can be assessed as high in relation to both the identified territorial needs and the programme's established objective structure. The programme is designed as a cross-border cooperation instrument operating across a large, multi-country territory and is structured around multiple thematic priorities and specific objectives, which provides the basis for addressing challenges linked to sparsity, distance and cross-border functional integration.

The link between the programme's overall objectives, the specific objectives and the operations financed appears clear. Projects are thematically distributed across several priorities and collectively contribute to operationalising the programme's intervention logic by translating strategic ambitions into concrete cooperation activities. This indicates a high degree of internal coherence, whereby the selected operations in practice address the needs and development challenges that underpin the programme's rationale

Relevance is particularly evident in relation to the programme's focus on long-term capacity building, sustainable development and the establishment of structures for cross-border cooperation. The programme's design and its implementation architecture emphasise cross-border added value and joint approaches, which is consistent with the core rationale of Interreg A programmes.

3.4.2 Risks to relevance

A first potential risk relates to thematic dilution. Interreg Aurora has a broad scope across multiple priorities and specific objectives. While this breadth supports overall relevance to diverse territorial needs, it may also entail a risk that resources are spread across many intervention areas, limiting critical mass within individual objectives. Over time, this can make it more difficult to demonstrate coherent and cumulative results in priority development areas, which is central to the Commission's results-based logic.

A related risk concerns long-term strategic focus. Rapid mobilisation of projects may partly reflect early demand pressure and a strong pipeline. If subsequent project selection is not used actively to consolidate a smaller number of priority result pathways, there is a risk that the link between identified needs, specific objectives and aggregated effects becomes less visible over time. This is particularly pertinent in a programme context where the intervention logic relies on cumulative contribution across operations rather than on single investments.

3.4.3 Effectiveness

From an effectiveness perspective, and in line with the European Commission's evaluation framework, Interreg Aurora shows signs of an appropriate implementation performance

relative to its early stage of the programme period. The programme's structures and processes support the translation of programme priorities into operational decisions and project selection, consistent with how cross-border cooperation programmes are implemented through joint programme arrangements.

The programme's implementation set-up also includes regular reporting and structured transmission of programme data to the Commission, which reflects an established monitoring and reporting architecture. This provides the foundation for tracking implementation progress and early delivery against the programme's objectives.

3.4.4 Risks to effectiveness

From an effectiveness standpoint, a central potential risk concerns the balance between the pace of project selection and delivery capacity. Early commitment of a substantial share of resources into selected operations is consistent with an active implementation phase; however, it also means that future effectiveness becomes highly dependent on projects' delivery performance. If a material share of projects experiences delays, capacity constraints or administrative obstacles during implementation, this may slow down expenditure execution and, by extension, the timely delivery of outputs and results—particularly in complex cross-border settings.

A further potential risk relates to administrative and governance load. A high number of ongoing projects in a geographically extensive, multi-jurisdictional programme area increases demands on programme bodies for monitoring, verification, support to beneficiaries, and reporting. In such contexts, bottlenecks may arise in processing, follow-up and reporting if capacity and procedures are not sufficiently robust throughout the programming period. The presence of formal reporting requirements and recurring “transmission of data” cycles illustrate the importance of sustained administrative capacity to maintain implementation momentum.

4. Portfolio scope and results so far

The chapter below presents the project portfolio, partner distribution and synthesises evidence on completed operations and emerging results. At the time of the evaluation, the programme portfolio comprises 163 operations and demonstrates a clear thematic focus and strong internal coherence between priorities and specific objectives. The data used for the portfolio analysis were extracted from the national project database maintained by The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket).

The largest share of operations is concentrated under Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth), followed by Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism), Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation) and Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition), confirming a focused and consistent intervention logic. Implementation is still ongoing for most operations, with 36 percent completed, reflecting a portfolio that is largely in its delivery phase. Completion rates are highest in governance-oriented objectives, while climate adaptation and biodiversity show slower progress, consistent with longer and more field-intensive implementation cycles. Overall, the portfolio is well aligned with programme objectives, while highlighting delivery risks within parts of Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition), the limited representation of sustainable mobility, and asymmetries in country participation that merit management attention as implementation progresses.

The portfolio and completion analysis point to a limited number of key implementation risks that warrant management attention. Most notably, delivery under Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition) appears delayed, with particularly low completion levels in climate change adaptation and biodiversity, implying a risk that environmental objectives may materialise late in the programme period. This increases the importance of closer milestone monitoring and active risk management to safeguard timely delivery. In parallel, sustainable mobility remains structurally under-represented, with only one operation completed, raising questions as to whether the full scope of the priority is being effectively addressed or whether targeted mobilisation measures are required. It should be noted that the Managing Authority on the mandate of the Monitoring Committee has undertaken a range of measures to strengthen inflow in under-represented areas. While these efforts have not yet translated into a clearly improved completion profile in the March 2026 snapshot, early signals from Call 8 indicate a higher volume of applications under Priority 2, suggesting a potential strengthening of the pipeline going forward. The completion profile is further skewed towards governance- and innovation-oriented objectives, reflecting shorter project cycles but also creating a risk of temporal imbalance in interim performance assessments.

4.1 Portfolio overview

Taken together the programme portfolio is thematically well-structured, with limited dispersion across objectives. This concentration supports strategic clarity and facilitates performance monitoring, while also signalling potential areas for future pipeline development where allocations are currently limited (notably sustainable mobility).

The project portfolio, which at the time of the evaluation consists of 163 operations, demonstrates a clear thematic concentration and strong internal coherence between priorities and specific objectives. The largest share of operations falls under Priority 1 - Smart and sustainable growth (61 projects; 37.4 percent), followed by Priority 3 - Education, culture and sustainable tourism (43; 26.4 percent), Priority 4 - Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation (31; 19.0 percent), and Priority 2 - Green and sustainable transition (28; 17.2 percent). The distribution by specific objective confirms a focused intervention logic, with activity concentrated in Smart specialisation, research and innovation (44; 27.0 percent), Cross-border capacity building (31; 19.0 percent), Culture and sustainable tourism (26; 16.0 percent), Competitiveness of SMEs (17; 10.4 percent), Education and lifelong learning (17; 10.4 percent), Nature protection and biodiversity (14; 8.6 percent), and Climate change adaptation (13; 8.0 percent).

Under Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth), the portfolio is strongly concentrated in innovation and competitiveness-related delivery, with operations primarily contributing to Smart specialisation, research and innovation (44 operations) and Competitiveness of SMEs (17 operations). This confirms that the programme's smart growth strand is implemented mainly through R&I-driven operations complemented by measures supporting SME capacity and clustering.

Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism) is implemented primarily through people-centred development, with operations allocated to Culture and sustainable tourism (26 operations) and Education and lifelong learning (17 operations). This demonstrates a clear thematic focus on social inclusion, skills, and cultural/tourism assets as drivers of community resilience and regional attractiveness.

Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition) is distributed across three environmental specific objectives: Climate change adaptation (SO 2.1; 13 operations), Nature protection and biodiversity (SO 2.2; 14 operations), and a very limited allocation to Sustainable mobility (SO 2.3; 1 operation). The figure therefore highlights both the programme's substantive engagement in adaptation and biodiversity and, at the same time, the comparatively marginal pipeline under sustainable mobility.

Finally, Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation) is implemented entirely through the specific objective Cross-border capacity building (31 operations),

underscoring the programme's clear governance logic and the role of capacity-building measures in strengthening cross-border cooperation structures.

4.1.1 Distribution of lead partners and partners across the programme

The programme's delivery structure is characterised by a strong knowledge- and innovation-driven lead partner profile, combined with compact cross-border partnerships. Across the 163 operations in the portfolio, universities and higher education institutions act as beneficiaries (lead partners) in 92 operations (56.4 percent), underlining the central role of research, competence building and innovation ecosystems in implementation. Other lead partner types are present but represent smaller shares, including regional/public authorities (12; 7.4 percent), companies (7; 4.3 percent), NGOs/associations/foundations (6; 3.7 percent), and municipalities/cities (5; 3.1 percent). A further 41 operations (25.2 percent) fall under "Other/Unknown", which largely reflects limitations in name-based classification (e.g. cluster organisations, specialised institutes and EGTS-type bodies) rather than an absence of institutional identity. This suggests that introducing a standardised "type of organisation" tag in programme metadata would strengthen transparency and facilitate EC reporting on the delivery chain.

4.2 Completed operations

As of 31 March 2026, a total of 15 operations in the portfolio are completed (based on their contracted end date), according to data provided by the Managing Authority of the Interreg Aurora Programme.

Completed operations represent EUR 20,735,463 in granted EU support and EUR 32,079,796 in total budget (total cost, EUR).

4.2.1 The distribution between priorities and specific objectives

The distribution of funding across completed operations reflects the internal priority structure of Interreg Aurora.

Among completed operations, EU support is clearly concentrated in Priority 1 (Smart and sustainable growth), which accounts for 8 completed operations and EUR 12,214,055 (approximately 58.9 percent of EU support in the completed set). Priority 2 (Green and sustainable transition) includes 3 completed operations with EUR 3,174,875 (approximately 15.3 percent), while Priority 3 (Education, culture and sustainable tourism) includes 2 completed operations and EUR 4,392,398 (approximately 21.2 percent). Priority 4 (Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation) comprises 2 completed operations but

represents a comparatively small share of EU support at EUR 954,135 (approximately 4.6 percent), reflecting the typically lower-cost and more capacity-building-oriented character of governance actions. Taken together, this distribution implies that evidence from completed operations is currently strongest for the programme's smart growth axis, while the environmental transition strand is less represented in the completed set, which should be considered when interpreting early results and goal-achievement patterns.

4.2.2 The distribution between specific objectives

Under the programme's specific objectives, the supported portfolio is distributed across seven objective codes. The largest concentration is under Specific Objective 1.1, which includes six projects: GreenBattery; HE4T – Harvesting Energy for Data Acquisition and Transfer; Summation – (Sustainable Autonomous Systems and Solutions); Eco-friendly and sustainable method for recycling of spent lithium-ion batteries (EcoLIB); SAMHand – Sustainable Autonomous Material Handling; and OFFwind – Offshore Wind Turbine Farms. Specific Objective 1.2 is addressed by two projects, namely ClimateFood: Climate-Smart Food via Cross-Border Cooperation – With Businesses, for the Businesses! and ISSUES – Information Security and digital Services for sUustainable designS.

In addition, Specific Objective 2.2 comprises two projects (RE-HYDRO – Rethinking Hydropower Management: Safeguarding Biodiversity while improving Climate Adaptation and SeaMoreEco – Seamless monitoring, restoration and conservation in the northern Gulf of Bothnia), while Specific Objective 2.3 is covered by one project (FAIR 2). Under the social and cultural objectives, Specific Objective 3.1 is represented by one project (Borderless Game Academy), and Specific Objective 3.2 by one project (ICH North – passing on our musical heritage). Finally, Specific Objective 4.1 includes two projects: NOWA – Nordic Waste Management Vision and Girku SOS – Northern Sami Helpline – Helpline and suicide prevention. Overall, this distribution indicates a strong emphasis on activities aligned with Specific Objective 1.1, complemented by more targeted interventions across the remaining objectives.

The current portfolio shows a clear thematic concentration, with a substantial share of operations clustered under Specific Objective 1.1. This pattern suggests that programme implementation has so far prioritised interventions aligned with the innovation- and competitiveness-oriented strands of the intervention logic. Such a concentration can be advantageous in terms of critical mass and coherence, as it may facilitate stronger cross-project synergies, shared learning, and more visible aggregate effects within the objective area.

At the same time, the presence of operations under Specific Objectives 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2 and 4.1 indicates a degree of strategic breadth. However, these objectives currently appear to be supported through a smaller number of projects, which may limit the extent to which results can be scaled or generalised across territories and stakeholder groups. In this

context, the programme may wish to ensure that knowledge transfer and dissemination mechanisms are sufficiently strong to maximise spill-overs from single or few operations, particularly where objectives are represented by only one project.

Overall, the observed distribution points to a portfolio that combines a strong core focus with selective coverage of complementary priorities. From an evaluative perspective, this implies that the programme's aggregate results are likely to be most readily evidenced under the objectives with the highest project density, while conclusions for objectives with fewer operations will require a more cautious interpretation and may rely more heavily on qualitative evidence and case-based assessment.

4.2.3 Goal achievements

The analysis below is based exclusively on the 12 projects for which a final report has been submitted (i.e. projects with status "Final report approved" or "Final report submitted but not yet assessed/approved"). The three projects whose final report has not been submitted or is still expected ("Not submitted/expected") have been excluded from the calculations. Each "observation" refers to one project–indicator row (i.e. one reported outcome compared to one decision target).

Overall, the indicator types that are most consistently achieved and in one case exceeded in volume terms are those capturing immediate, output-oriented cooperation results that are directly attributable to project delivery and can be verified within the reporting cycle. The strongest example is "Organisations cooperating across borders", where 6 of 7 observations (85.7 percent) meet or exceed the target and the median fulfilment is 100 percent. Although one larger target is not fully reached (bringing the weighted fulfilment to 82.2 percent), the pattern indicates that cross-border cooperation outputs are strongly embedded in project implementation and are generally deliverable and measurable at closure. Similarly, "Enterprises cooperating with research organisations" performs very robustly: 4 of 5 observations (80.0 percent) reach the target and the median is 100 percent, while the portfolio exceeds targets in volume terms (weighted fulfilment 112.0 percent, with 47 reported against 42 targeted). This suggests that cooperation volumes can outpace initial planning where partnerships mature or expand during implementation.

A second group of indicators tends to perform close to target, even if targets are not consistently reached in every observation. "Research organisations participating in joint research projects" reaches the target in 3 of 5 observations (60.0 percent) yet shows a median fulfilment of 100 percent and a high weighted fulfilment of 91.7 percent, indicating that many projects deliver outcomes very close to the agreed levels. Output indicators linked to planning and programme engagement also show reasonably strong performance: "Applications submitted to EU programmes" reaches targets in 1 of 3 observations (33.3 percent) but still achieves 75.0 percent weighted fulfilment, reflecting that shortfalls are not always

large in volume terms even when targets are missed. Likewise, “Jointly developed strategies and action plans” (excluding the “taken up” dimension) reaches targets in 2 of 4 observations (50.0 percent), with a median fulfilment of 75.0 percent and 66.7 percent weighted fulfilment, pointing to partial delivery that is often close to planned scale. A similar “close-to-target but uneven” profile is visible for “Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects” (targets met in 1 of 3 observations (33.3 percent), 57.9 percent weighted fulfilment, median around 55.0 percent), and for “Jointly developed solutions” (targets met in 2 of 8 observations (25.0 percent), 58.6 percent weighted fulfilment, median around 58.0 percent). Taken together, these patterns suggest that a substantial share of expected outputs is delivered, but that the final scale achieved can be sensitive to definitions, counting rules, or project-specific delivery constraints.

By contrast, a third group of indicator types systematically underperforms and constitutes the clearest bottleneck in reported performance. These are predominantly indicators designed to capture uptake, scaling, innovation adoption, or structural/institutional change, which typically require a longer time horizon and/or depend on external actors’ decisions. In the submitted-final-report subset, “Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations” does not meet targets in any of the 6 observations (0.0 percent) and records only 6.7 percent weighted fulfilment (1 reported against 15 targeted), with a median of 0.0 percent. “SMEs introducing product or process innovations” also shows 0.0 percent achievement (0 of 2) and 0.0 percent weighted fulfilment, indicating that innovation adoption is not evidenced within the current reporting timeframe. Indicators linked to regulatory or administrative barriers similarly remain at 0.0 percent achievement, including “Solutions identified to address cross-border legal/administrative barriers” (0 of 1; 0.0 percent weighted fulfilment). The indicator “Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion” performs weakly overall: only 2 of 6 observations (33.3 percent) reach the target and the median fulfilment is 0.0 percent, while weighted fulfilment is 14.7 percent (5 reported against 34 targeted). This implies that continued post-completion cooperation may occur in some cases but is not yet consistently evidenced across the portfolio at the time of reporting.

A further nuance is “Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations”, which has 0.0 percent target achievement (0 of 3) but a median fulfilment of 50.0 percent and 40.0 percent weighted fulfilment. This suggests that some uptake is reported, but not at the full target level—consistent with uptake being gradual and difficult to verify comprehensively at closure.

Taken together, the indicator-level evidence for the 12 submitted-final-report projects points to a comparatively strong delivery profile on direct, short-term outputs (especially cross-border cooperation and research–business cooperation), more mixed but often “near-target” performance for several implementation-stage outputs (strategies, pilots, jointly developed solutions), and systematic underperformance for indicators intended to capture longer-term effects (uptake, scaling, SME innovation adoption, and barrier reduction). For

evaluation purposes, this implies that portfolio performance is currently most robust where indicators align with verifiable outputs within the reporting cycle, while the main gap lies in demonstrating post-completion effects that require additional time, follow-up arrangements, and/or clearer operationalisation and verification pathways.

Within the 12 projects, the highest achievement rate is observed in SeaMoreEco (66.7 percent; 2 of 3 indicators achieved), followed by GreenBattery (50.0 percent; 3 of 6) and EcoLIB (50.0 percent; 2 of 4). At the lower end, ClimateFood reaches 20.0 percent of indicators (1 of 5), ICH North reaches 25.0 percent (1 of 4), and FAIR 2 reaches 33.3 percent (1 of 3). These differences underscore that performance is not uniform across projects and that outcomes depend strongly on the mix of indicators and the extent to which projects have been able to translate outputs into measurable post-completion uptake.

4.3 Illustrative evidence on results

The Interreg Aurora programme systematically disseminates project results through its Results news section. This communication channel provides concrete illustrations of outputs, early outcomes and emerging effects across thematic areas and across the programme geography.

Results are frequently concrete and practice-oriented, even when their ultimate effects are long-term or indirect. Many projects explicitly position themselves as stepping stones towards follow-up projects, larger investments or future policy processes. Cross-border cooperation is consistently framed as a necessary condition for achieving results, not merely a formal programme requirement. Cultural, environmental and social dimensions are strongly represented alongside innovation and resilience, reflecting the programme's broad and integrated intervention logic.

Strengthening Cross-Border Cooperation and Institutional Capacity

Several result stories highlight projects whose primary contribution lies in the establishment and consolidation of cross-border cooperation structures.

The project Arena North Calotte is presented as a completed small-scale operation with a clear focus on long-term cooperation between actors in northern Sweden, Finland and Norway. The results emphasise institutional learning, trust-building and strengthened coordination capacity across borders, rather than short-term operational outputs.

Lávdan Sámi Arena, an activity delivered under the operation ReCap ASÁp, is described as a successful cross-border meeting place bringing together Sámi actors from different countries. The result story underlines the programme's role in enabling inclusive and culturally grounded cooperation formats, which would be difficult to establish and sustain within purely national frameworks.

Programme-level interpretation

Together, these examples illustrate how Interreg Aurora contributes to Union added value through durable cooperation platforms, particularly in sparsely populated and culturally diverse regions where institutional fragmentation would otherwise constrain collaboration and joint action.

Knowledge Generation and Innovation Readiness

A recurring pattern in the Results news concerns projects that prioritise knowledge generation, pilot activities and preparatory work, rather than immediate large-scale implementation.

The small-scale project Power line monitoring for increased resilience is explicitly framed as a knowledge-building initiative aimed at risk reduction, system resilience and consortium formation. Its main contribution lies in preparing the ground for a future full-scale project, rather than delivering immediate deployment.

Likewise, SealHabitat provides telemetry-based knowledge on Baltic ringed seal habitat use, supporting improved monitoring methods and evidence-based environmental management. The results highlight scientific outputs with clear policy relevance, rather than direct intervention or regulatory change.

These examples confirm Interreg Aurora's role as a preparatory and enabling instrument, supporting early-stage innovation, evidence generation and decision support that can feed into subsequent investments, policy processes or larger programme interventions.

Environmental Protection and Behavioural Change

Environmental sustainability features prominently in several result stories, often combined with behavioural or governance-oriented approaches.

The result story Behavioural change to slow the spread of invasive alien species addresses how human behaviour contributes to environmental risks on municipal land in northern Sweden and Finland. The emphasis is placed on awareness-raising and behaviour-oriented measures as key mechanisms for environmental protection.

In parallel, the SealHabitat project also contributes to environmental protection by improving understanding of sensitive ecosystems and supporting more informed and sustainable management practices through enhanced monitoring knowledge.

These results demonstrate that Interreg Aurora projects often contribute to environmental objectives through knowledge, monitoring and behavioural pathways, rather than relying solely on infrastructure investment or regulatory instruments.

Cultural Sustainability and Indigenous Livelihoods

A distinct and visible strand of Results news relates to Sámi culture, language and livelihoods, reflecting the programme's geographical and cultural context.

The result story Empowering Sámi duodji – strengthening cultural tradition and economic livelihood documents how a small-scale project supports Sámi handicraft as both a cultural practice and a source of livelihood, explicitly linking heritage preservation with economic sustainability.

Similarly, Cross-border project enhances Skolt Sámi language and culture highlights concrete actions to support minority language use and cultural exchange across borders between Finland and Norway.

These examples show how Interreg Aurora operationalises social and cultural sustainability, translating cross-border cooperation into tangible benefits for Indigenous and minority communities that extend beyond symbolic or representational outcomes.

Skills Development and Community-Based Learning

Some result stories focus on practical skills development and local learning environments.

The result story Nordskills – News from the Malax School Workshop presents hands-on workshops carried out in educational settings, such as practical fermentation activities. These results illustrate knowledge transfer and applied learning at community level, with a strong emphasis on learning-by-doing.

Such results underline Interreg Aurora's contribution to human capital development and local capacity building, often through low-threshold, practice-oriented activities rather than formal education reforms or system-level interventions.

4.3.1 Effects

Differences between projects become even more pronounced when considering effects, particularly in terms of time horizon and attribution.

Projects with direct service or behavioural orientation (Girku SOS, ISSUES) show short-term and attributable effects, such as increased access to support, improved organisational preparedness or changed practices among users.

In contrast, research- and innovation-driven projects (OFFwind, Green Battery, Eco-Lib, Summation, SAMHand) primarily generate indirect and longer-term effects, dependent on external factors such as market development, regulatory frameworks, investment decisions

or follow-up funding. In these cases, effects are better understood as enhanced readiness, reduced uncertainty or strengthened capacity, rather than immediate change.

Community- and learning-oriented projects (ICH North, Climate Food, Borderless Game Academy) occupy an intermediate position, where effects include network strengthening, skills development and changes in attitudes or practices, often diffused across actors and over time.

A key commonality is that all projects demonstrate plausible contribution pathways to effects, but only some can reasonably be expected to demonstrate measurable impacts within a single project cycle.

4.3.2 EU Added Value

Across the project portfolio, EU added value is strongly consistent and expressed through different mechanisms.

First, all projects demonstrate clear cross-border added value. In many cases, results would either not have been achievable at all or would have been significantly weaker without cross-border cooperation (e.g. shared curricula, joint datasets, culturally coherent services across Sápmi, comparable environmental monitoring).

Second, several projects illustrate critical mass and knowledge pooling, particularly in sparsely populated regions where national resources are fragmented (OFFwind, Sea-More Eco, Green Battery).

Third, projects addressing Sámi culture, language and wellbeing (Girku SOS, ICH North) show EU added value through inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and cross-border cultural continuity, which cannot be effectively addressed within national silos.

Finally, many projects act as stepping stones to larger European or international initiatives (e.g. Horizon Europe, follow-up Interreg projects), reinforcing the EU's role as an enabler of longer-term transformation rather than a stand-alone funder.

5. Main project actors

The programme's delivery structure is characterised by a strong knowledge- and innovation-driven lead partner profile, combined with compact cross-border partnerships. Across the 163 operations in the portfolio, universities and higher education institutions act as beneficiaries (lead partners) in 92 operations (56.4 percent), underlining the central role of research, competence building and innovation ecosystems in implementation. Other lead partner types are present but represent smaller shares, including regional/public authorities (12; 7.4 percent), companies (7; 4.3 percent), NGOs/associations/foundations (6; 3.7 percent), and municipalities/cities (5; 3.1 percent). A further 41 operations (25.2 percent) fall under "Other/Unknown", which largely reflects limitations in name-based classification (e.g. cluster organisations, specialised institutes and EGTS-type bodies) rather than an absence of institutional identity. This suggests that introducing a standardised "type of organisation" tag in programme metadata would strengthen transparency and facilitate EC reporting on the delivery chain.

The lead partner profile differs by priority in a manner consistent with the programme intervention logic. In Smart and sustainable growth, implementation is overwhelmingly led by higher education institutions (51 out of 61 operations), aligning with the objective focus on smart specialisation, research and innovation and SME competitiveness. In Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation, lead partners are more heterogeneous and more frequently fall into the "Other/Unknown" category (15 operations), which is typical for governance and capacity-building actions led by networks or specialised cooperation structures. Education, culture and sustainable tourism is led by a mix of academic actors (23 operations) and cooperation platforms and destination/culture actors (reflected in 13 "Other/Unknown"), while Green and sustainable transition shows a more hybrid lead partner mix, with both universities (11) and regional/public authorities (6) playing important roles—consistent with the need for implementation mandates and regulatory or coordination capacity in environmental domains.

Partnership structures within operations are typically small to medium-sized, supporting manageability and delivery efficiency. On average, projects involve 2.30 EU partners and 0.24 Norwegian partners (mean), corresponding to an overall mean of 2.54 partners per operation (excluding the beneficiary itself). The median partnership size is 2 partners, and 75 percent of operations involve three or fewer partners, indicating that most projects are organised in compact consortia with clear coordination lines. At the same time, a smaller set of operations uses broader partnership constellations (up to 10 partners) to increase geographic and sectoral reach—particularly visible in culture/tourism and cross-border cooperation actions where multi-destination or multi-institution approaches are required.

The cross-border dimension is structurally embedded in the partnerships. Finland and Sweden are involved in almost all operations, primarily as beneficiaries. Norway participates

in 67 operations (41.1 percent), but consistently in the role of beneficiary funded through national IR support rather than EU funding. Norwegian partners are thus always beneficiaries in formal programme terms, but never recipients of EU support.

This pattern reflects a mature and well-established cooperation structure, characterised by strong Finnish and Swedish participation combined with selective Norwegian involvement. At the same time, it highlights potential scope—where strategically relevant—to further strengthen Norwegian participation within specific priorities or objectives, while taking into account the existing funding and eligibility framework.

Examples from the portfolio illustrate the diversity of beneficiary types and partnership profiles. For instance, University of Oulu leads SUSEN (Project ID 20357899) under Smart and sustainable growth / Smart specialisation, research and innovation, reflecting the academic lead model typical for the innovation priority. A business-led example is RISE Proccessum AB leading GreenBattery (Project ID 20357574) under the same objective area, demonstrating that the programme also enables private-sector leadership in innovation-oriented operations. In the green transition domain, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (Project ID 20358024, SeaMoreEco) illustrates public authority leadership under Nature protection and biodiversity, while cooperation platforms such as Kvarkenrådet EGTS (Project ID 20357934, Bothnian Coastal Route) exemplify lead partner forms that are central in tourism and cross-border route development and may require more explicit categorisation in programme monitoring data.

6. Partnership patterns, Union added value and efficiency

Overall, the partnership model in Interreg Aurora delivers strong Union added value through durable cross-border cooperation and knowledge transfer, while also shaping implementation efficiency in differentiated ways. Maintaining the strengths of established partnerships, while progressively broadening participation and addressing structural asymmetries, will be important to maximise both effectiveness and Union added value over the remainder of the programming period.

The observed partnership pattern in Interreg Aurora constitutes a central source of Union added value. The programme is characterised by stable and institutionally anchored cross-border partnerships, predominantly involving public authorities, universities and research organisations across Sweden, Finland and Norway. These partnerships enable forms of cooperation, knowledge exchange and joint problem-solving that would be difficult to achieve through national or regional funding alone, thereby delivering clear added value in line with the Interreg rationale. In particular, the high prevalence of tri-national and recurrent partnerships supports mutual learning, trust-building and the development of shared approaches to common challenges in sparsely populated and Arctic regions.

From an efficiency perspective, these established partnerships appear to facilitate relatively smooth project start-up and delivery, especially in governance- and innovation-oriented interventions. The concentration of completed operations within cross-border capacity building and research- and innovation-related objectives suggests that existing networks reduce transaction costs, lower coordination barriers and enable faster mobilisation of activities. This contributes positively to implementation efficiency, particularly for objectives with shorter delivery cycles and lower operational complexity.

At the same time, the partnership structure also implies certain efficiency and added-value risks. The strong reliance on established academic and public-sector networks may limit the inflow of new actors, including private enterprises, smaller organisations and indigenous actors, potentially constraining innovation diversity and the breadth of societal uptake. In this sense, high institutional stability supports efficiency in delivery but may weaken dynamic efficiency and the programme's capacity to reach new target groups. This trade-off is particularly relevant in objectives where private-sector engagement and market uptake are critical for longer-term impact.

Compared to Interreg Nord and Interreg Botnia–Atlantica, Interreg Aurora expands the overall programme area to include additional inland regions and territories beyond those previously covered, most notably Jämtland and Idre Sameby in Sweden, Kainuu and North Karelia in Finland, and Trøndelag as well as parts of Innlandet in Norway. It should,

however, be clarified that the geographical scope of the Sápmi area itself does not differ from that of Interreg Nord.

Interreg Aurora is structured around two distinct sub-areas with different geographies and territorial logics: the Sápmi sub-area and the Aurora sub-area. While the Sápmi sub-area maintains continuity with the former Nord programme in geographical terms, the Aurora sub-area represents a wider geography towards inland and southern regions. This differentiated structure broadens the programme's overall territorial coverage and strengthens its potential to address cross-border challenges related to sparsity, inland development and Indigenous livelihoods.

At the same time, it remains difficult at this stage to identify robust empirical evidence on the extent to which the additional regions included in the Aurora sub-area have been effectively integrated into the programme's project portfolio. Further analysis over time will be required to assess whether the new geography is translating into substantive cross-border cooperation and thematic engagement across the full programme area.

Nevertheless, available examples indicate that the expanded geography is reflected in at least parts of the portfolio. For instance, BRY has a lead partner located in Kainuu. In addition, in consultations with the project manager for ClimateFood, the project is reported to have strong coverage in Kainuu and North Karelia. This does not imply that other regions are absent from the programme; rather, their involvement is not made explicit in the documentation reviewed or in the set of projects consulted for the in-depth analysis with the exception from ClimateFood (see Appendix).

Finally, Norway's participation pattern—through Norwegian beneficiaries financed via national IR funding rather than EU co-financing—illustrates both Union added value and potential efficiency implications. On the one hand, Norwegian involvement reinforces the genuinely cross-border character of operations and strengthens the European dimension of cooperation. On the other hand, differences in financing arrangements and financial flows between EU co-financing and national IR support may add complexity to governance, reporting and financial management, which can affect administrative efficiency as implementation intensifies.

7. In-depth analysis of results, effects, target groups, partnerships and goal achievement from twelve completed operations

This chapter synthesises evidence from (i) final reporting and published outputs and (ii) semi-structured informant interviews (project leads/partners). Interview insights are used to confirm, nuance or qualify documentary evidence, particularly regarding uptake, sustainability and delivery constraints. The operations included in the in-depth study are presented in

Table 2. List of operations included in the in-depth analysis.

Project	Priority	Specific objective
FAIR 2	Green and sustainable transition	Sustainable mobility
Girku – SOS	Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation	Cross-border capacity building
Borderless Game Academy	Education, culture and sustainable tourism	Education and lifelong learning
ICH North	Education, culture and sustainable tourism	Culture and sustainable tourism
OFFWind	Smart and sustainable growth	Smart specialization, research and innovation
Green Battery	Smart and sustainable growth	Smart specialization, research and innovation
Summation	Smart and sustainable growth	Smart specialization, research and innovation
SAMHand	Smart and sustainable growth	Smart specialization, research and innovation
Eco-Lib	Smart and sustainable growth	Smart specialization, research and innovation
ISSUES	Smart and sustainable growth	Competitiveness of SME:s
Climate Food	Smart and sustainable growth	Competitiveness of SME:s
SeaMore Eco	Green and sustainable transition	Nature protection and biodiversity

Source: Interreg Aurora website.

Taken together, the projects show high coherence with Interreg Aurora’s intervention logic while exhibiting deliberate diversity in target groups, partnership models and result pathways. The main difference lies in whether projects are designed to deliver immediate, user-facing results or to prepare the ground for future change.

This diversity should be understood as a strength rather than a weakness, provided that programme-level assessment frameworks adequately capture qualitative, long-term and

capacity-building effects, which constitute a substantial share of the projects' EU added value.

7.1 Target Groups

Across the analysed projects, a clear distinction can be observed between direct service-oriented target groups, professional/organisational target groups, and strategic or systemic target groups.

Projects such as Girku SOS and ISSUES primarily target end users and frontline organisations. Girku SOS is explicitly oriented towards individuals within Sámi communities experiencing psychological distress, while ISSUES focuses on SMEs and public organisations with limited internal cybersecurity capacity. These projects are characterised by clearly defined and reachable target groups, often requiring culturally or contextually adapted delivery mechanisms.

In contrast, projects such as OFFwind, Green Battery, Eco-Lib, Summation and SAMHand mainly address professional, institutional or industrial actors, including researchers, technology developers, public authorities and industry stakeholders. Their target groups are less about immediate service uptake and more about knowledge use, innovation capacity and decision support, often at system or sector level.

A third group, including ICH North, Climate Food and Borderless Game Academy, targets communities of practice and intermediary actors (educators, cultural actors, SMEs, students). These projects combine direct engagement with longer-term capacity building, often operating through learning environments, networks or community-based processes.

Overall, while all projects define relevant target groups, they differ substantially in proximity to end beneficiaries and in the time horizon required for results to materialise.

7.2 Partnerships

Partnership structures show a high degree of consistency across projects in terms of cross-border composition, but differ in depth, symmetry and functional roles.

Most projects rely on institutionally anchored partnerships involving universities, research institutes, public authorities or established NGOs (e.g. OFFwind, Green Battery, Sea-More Eco, ICH North). These partnerships are typically stable and recurrent, enabling efficient implementation and trust-based cooperation.

Projects such as Borderless Game Academy, Climate Food and SAMHand demonstrate more complementary partnership models, where different partners contribute distinct

competences (e.g. education systems, advisory services, research infrastructure, industry access). In these cases, cross-border cooperation is essential for achieving results that could not be delivered nationally, particularly regarding curriculum alignment, shared methodologies or joint testing environments.

Girku SOS stands out through a partnership model combining civil society organisations and culturally embedded volunteer structures, where trust, language and legitimacy are more critical than institutional scale.

Across all projects, partnerships are not merely administrative arrangements but function as core delivery mechanisms, reinforcing the programme's cooperation logic. Differences lie primarily in whether partnerships aim at service delivery, knowledge production or system preparation.

7.3 Results

Project results vary considerably in form, tangibility and maturity, but several common patterns emerge.

A first group of projects delivers operational and directly usable results, such as helplines, tools, platforms, curricula or educational materials (Girku SOS, ISSUES, Borderless Game Academy, ICH North). These results are typically accessible during or immediately after the project period and can be directly linked to defined outputs.

A second group produces analytical, technical or methodological results, including studies, models, datasets, pilot demonstrations and feasibility analyses (OFFwind, Green Battery, Eco-Lib, Summation, SAMHand, SeaMore Eco). In line with programme requirements, project results are made available as open access. No evidence was identified of results being restricted from public access.

Projects such as Climate Food combine both result types, delivering concrete tools (e.g. dashboards, workbooks) while also generating analytical insights into practices, behaviours and structural challenges.

The main difference between projects is therefore not result quality but result function: some results are ends in themselves, while others are inputs into longer innovation or policy chains.

7.4 Goal achievement

Across the reviewed projects, goal achievement is generally reported as high. Most projects state that core objectives have been achieved or largely achieved, and this assessment is

consistently echoed by project informants. In several cases, projects report that key outputs and some indicators have been met or exceeded, particularly those related to knowledge generation, service establishment, network building and cross-border cooperation.

At the same time, both reporting and interviews underline that not all ambitions can be realised within a single project period, especially where objectives relate to system change, market uptake or policy implementation.

Based on the analysed project currently reported outcomes, 32 targets remain below the levels set in the decision, across the 12 projects.

The most frequent types of underperformances are:

- Jointly developed solutions (6 instances below target),
- Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations (6),
- Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion (4),
- Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations (3).

Several entries indicate that figures are based on interim reporting or that final reports have been submitted but not yet validated; results may evolve following formal assessment.

Projects with clearly defined user-facing objectives report the highest degree of immediate goal achievement

In Girku SOS, the final reporting states that the project has successfully established a culturally and linguistically adapted support service for the Sámi population, which is now fully integrated into regular operations. Quantitative targets related to service uptake were met or exceeded, and interviewees explicitly confirm that the project's primary goals have been achieved.

Similarly, ISSUES reports that its objectives related to strengthening cybersecurity awareness and capacity among SMEs and public actors have been achieved. The project highlights extensive outreach, high engagement levels and continued use of its tools beyond the project period. Interview material confirms that the combination of low-threshold activities and cross-border knowledge sharing was effective in reaching the intended target groups.

Projects focused on research, innovation and system preparedness also report substantial goal achievement, but with a different character

In FAIR 2, the final report and interview evidence indicate that the project has successfully delivered its main objective: the creation of a comprehensive knowledge base on demand for sustainable regional aviation. Project informants explicitly state that the goal of providing a decision-support foundation for next implementation steps has been achieved, and in

some respects exceeded. However, both sources clarify that actual implementation of new routes lies beyond the project's mandate.

Similarly, OFFwind, Green Battery, Eco-Lib, Summation and SAMHand report that their technical, analytical and methodological objectives have largely been met. Final reports document the delivery of planned studies, pilots, demonstrations and knowledge outputs. Interviews confirm that these projects have achieved their stated goals in terms of knowledge creation, testing and collaboration, while also acknowledging that downstream effects (commercialisation, regulatory change, large-scale deployment) depend on external conditions.

Projects operating in the domains of culture, education and community-based learning report a high level of goal achievement, often combined with adaptive implementation

In ICH North, final reporting confirms that the project has delivered its core outputs (MOOC, digital map, educational materials) and strengthened cross-border networks around musical intangible cultural heritage. Interviews confirm that objectives related to visibility, participation and capacity building have been achieved, even though some activities required adjustment during implementation.

Borderless Game Academy reports that its main objective—establishing a cross-border education pathway—has been achieved, with concrete educational programmes launched and strong demand observed. Interviews confirm that the project met its core goals, while also highlighting that longer-term effects (e.g. broader institutional uptake) will materialise over time.

Climate Food reports achievement of its objectives related to identifying and promoting climate-smart practices and strengthening cross-border cooperation in the food sector. Interviews confirm that planned outputs were delivered, while also noting challenges in maintaining engagement among SMEs and sustaining tools beyond the project period.

8. Sub-area Sápmi

The Sápmi project portfolio within Interreg Aurora demonstrates a clear and coherent profile, rooted in cultural specificities and oriented towards long-term outcomes. Its focus on language, traditional knowledge, culture and societal capacity is highly relevant to the identified needs of the Sápmi area and supports the programme's strategic intention to address Sápmi not as a cross-cutting or horizontal issue, but as a distinct and integrated sub-area within cross-border cooperation.

The relationship between the Sápmi project portfolio and the objectives of the Interreg Aurora programme can be characterised by high relevance and a strong degree of goal congruence, particularly in the areas of language, culture, education and capacity building. The portfolio therefore functions as a targeted instrument for translating the programme's specific Sápmi ambitions into practice, rather than as a reflection of the programme's full thematic scope.

8.1 The Project portfolio

A review of the projects indicate that the Sápmi project portfolio exhibits a clear profile and a high degree of thematic coherence. The projects are predominantly concentrated within a limited number of thematic areas, namely Sámi languages and language revitalisation; culture, identity and traditional knowledge; Sámi society, public services and capacity building; and traditional Sámi livelihoods and ways of life. In this respect, the portfolio is clearly differentiated from the broader Interreg Aurora portfolio, which is to a greater extent characterised by initiatives related to technological development, energy, industrial value chains and environmental technologies.

8.1.1 A high degree of thematic coherence

A review of the projects indicate that the Sápmi project portfolio exhibits a clear profile and a high degree of thematic coherence. The projects are predominantly concentrated within a limited number of thematic areas, namely Sámi languages and language revitalisation; culture, identity and traditional knowledge; Sámi society, public services and capacity building; and traditional Sámi livelihoods and ways of life.

The portfolio is clearly differentiated from the broader Interreg Aurora portfolio, which is more strongly characterised by initiatives related to technological development, energy, industrial value chains and environmental technologies.

8.1.2 The Sámi languages in focus

The most prominent component of the Sápmi project portfolio consists of projects focusing on Sámi languages, with particular emphasis on languages classified as endangered or especially vulnerable.

Projects within this thematic area include Online tools for Inari Sámi and Ume Sámi language learning, Lohkanlihkkku, Oummu rãást raaj – People cross the borders, and Revitalisation of Skolt Sámi language and culture, including small-scale projects.

Collectively, these projects indicate a clear orientation towards language revitalisation, the development of pedagogical approaches and learning tools, and cross-border cooperation between Sámi language areas.

The language-focused projects are well aligned with Priority 3 of the programme “A more social Europe” in particular the specific objective related to education, culture and lifelong learning. At the same time, they directly address the Sápmi-specific selection criteria by strengthening Sámi languages and contributing to long-term benefits for Sámi society.

8.1.3 Culture, identity and traditional knowledge are frequently occurring

A further clearly defined component of the Sápmi project portfolio concerns Sámi culture, identity and traditional knowledge. Projects within this thematic area include Máhtut, Preparatory DigiÁrran, Sámi handicraft academy (small-scale project), Duodji Akademiiija 2027, Indigenous Digital Storytelling with New Media, Network of Finno-Ugric cultures in the North, and ICH North.

Collectively, these projects demonstrate a consistent focus on the documentation, development and transmission of traditional knowledge; cultural expressions such as duodji (Sámi handicrafts); and the use of digital and narrative methods to strengthen Indigenous culture. Several projects also emphasise cross-border cooperation between Sámi and related Indigenous and minority cultures.

This part of the portfolio contributes to cultural sustainability and social cohesion and aligns with the programme’s objectives related to culture, education and cross-border capacity building, while also responding directly to Sápmi-specific priorities concerning the preservation and strengthening of Sámi cultural heritage.

8.1.4 Strengthening societal structures, public services and institutional capacity

The Sápmi project portfolio also includes projects that explicitly address societal structures, public services and institutional capacity within a Sámi context. Projects within this thematic area include ReCap ASáp – Regaining capacity in a changing Sápmi, Cross-Border Cooperation in Sámi Children and Families Services, and Legal Terminology of Administrative Laws in Northern Sámi in Finland and Norway.

Collectively, these projects indicate a focus on strengthening institutional and organisational capacity, improving access to public services adapted to Sámi languages and conditions, and enhancing legal certainty and administrative accessibility across national borders.

This component of the portfolio is closely aligned with Priority 4 of the programme – Better Interreg governance – where cross-border capacity building constitutes a central objective. At the same time, the projects respond directly to Sápmi-specific priorities related to long-term societal resilience and the functioning of public institutions in Sámi areas.

8.1.5 Sámi livelihoods and ways of life linked to modern technology and cross-border cooperation

The portfolio also includes projects linked to traditional Sámi livelihoods and ways of life, most clearly represented by the project AirHerd, which is connected to reindeer herding. Although this thematic area is numerically smaller than those related to language and culture, it is of strategic importance. It illustrates how Interreg Aurora enables projects that link traditional livelihoods with modern technology and cross-border cooperation, in line with the programme's broader ambitions regarding sustainable development and innovation based on local conditions.

8.2 The programme's strategic contribution to addressing challenges in the programme area

Based on the analysis of the project portfolio, the programme demonstrates a clear strategic contribution, through its territorially differentiated approach, where Sápmi is treated as a distinct sub area within the programme framework.

The programme's strategic contribution, as reflected in the projects addresses structural and demographic challenges in a sparsely populated, cross border indigenous area through a focus on:

- language revitalisation,
- education and cultural transmission, and
- strengthened societal capacity and institutional cooperation.

Furthermore, the programme primarily targets long term and systemic challenges rather than short term symptoms, including:

- endangered Sámi languages,
- limited access to public services in Sámi languages, and
- fragmented governance structures across national borders.

The programme's strategic contribution therefore lies less in immediate quantitative effects and more in capacity building and system development. This orientation is consistent with the programme design for sub-area Sápmi and its emphasis on long term societal resilience.

8.3 The extent to which the sub-area Sámi has so far achieved its objectives

Based on the available project information, it is not possible to fully assess goal achievement in terms of results or impacts at this stage. However, a qualified assessment can be made regarding strategic direction and goal congruence.

The analysis indicates that the programme has successfully operationalised its objectives within:

- Priority 3 (education, culture and languages), and
- Priority 4 (capacity building and governance),

particularly within the Sápmi sub area.

The project portfolio demonstrates a high degree of alignment between programme objectives and implemented activities, which constitutes a strong indicator of appropriateness and internal coherence at an early stage of implementation.

At the same time, it is premature to draw conclusions regarding impacts, notably as many of the projects are:

- long term in nature,
- institutional in character, and
- oriented towards behavioural and structural change.

Overall, the programme demonstrates high goal congruence and satisfactory objective achievement in terms of strategic orientation and intervention logic, while the current evidence base for impact assessment still remains limited.

8.4 Prospects for achieving both the overall programme objective and specific objectives

The prospects for achieving the overall programme objective: enhanced competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness through cooperation are assessed as good. This is primarily because the programme does not seek to pursue all objectives uniformly across the territory, but instead applies a territorially differentiated logic, whereby Sápmi contributes mainly to social and cultural sustainability rather than narrowly defined economic growth.

Based on the composition of the project portfolio, a differentiated assessment can be made about the prospects for achieving the specific objectives under each programme priority.

With respect to Priority 3, the prospects are assessed as very good. The strong concentration of projects focusing on language, culture and education provides favourable conditions for achieving the specific objectives under this priority. The thematic focus and scope of the portfolio are well aligned with the intended intervention logic, supporting progress towards the priority's objectives.

For Priority 4, the prospects are assessed as good. Projects addressing public services, legal terminology and capacity building respond clearly to governance related challenges and contribute to strengthened institutional cooperation and administrative capacity, which are central elements of this priority.

Under Priority 1, the prospects can be characterised as selective. Contributions are present but remain niche oriented, for example in relation to traditional livelihoods. While achievement of the specific objectives is possible, the scope and breadth of interventions under this priority are limited.

For Priority 2, the prospects for direct achievement of objectives are assessed as limited. The portfolio contributes primarily through indirect pathways, notably via traditional knowledge and sustainable ways of life, rather than through technical, infrastructural or innovation driven interventions typically associated with this priority.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents our responses to the evaluation questions and assesses how the programme relates to the evaluation criteria. It then sets out our recommendations for Interreg Aurora as a whole. The chapter concludes with findings and recommendations specifically addressing the Sápmi sub-area.

9.1 Answers to the evaluation questions

The evaluation is guided throughout by the following evaluation questions:

1. How do the countries and regions within the programme area perceive cross-border cooperation programmes from a strategic perspective?
2. How relevant is the programme for the countries and regions concerned?
3. What long-term effects does the Interreg programme contribute to within the programme area?
4. What results do projects generate, how do these relate to the programme's overall objective, and how do they contribute to the added value of a cross-border programme?
5. Are there objectives and/or results that have not yet been achieved?
6. Which existing and emerging partnerships can be identified, and are there potential partnerships that remain missing?
7. How successfully has the programme reached potential beneficiaries in both the sub-area Aurora and the sub-area Sápmi?
8. How does the programme contribute to the main objectives of the EU's Arctic policy (climate action, sustainable development, environmental protection and international cooperation)?

9.1.1 Strategic perception of cross-border cooperation programmes

The evaluation finds that Interreg Aurora is perceived by countries and regions in the programme area as a strategically important instrument rather than a marginal funding source. The programme is viewed as essential for addressing structural territorial challenges related

to sparsity, long distances, limited critical mass and cross-border functional interdependencies. Its role as an enabler of long-term cooperation, joint knowledge development and shared solutions is widely recognised, particularly in areas where national or regional instruments are insufficient. The territorially differentiated set-up, including Sápmi as a distinct sub-area, is assessed as strategically appropriate.

9.1.2 Relevance for countries and regions

Interreg Aurora is assessed as highly relevant for the countries and regions within the programme area. There is strong alignment between identified territorial needs and the programme's objectives, priorities and project portfolio. Relevance is particularly evident in innovation and smart specialisation, green transition through knowledge and pilot actions, education and culture, social sustainability, and cross-border cooperation. In the Sápmi sub-area, relevance is further reinforced by a close match between programme interventions and needs related to language revitalisation, cultural sustainability and institutional capacity.

9.1.3 Contribution to long-term effects

At the current stage of implementation, the programme's contribution to long-term effects is primarily prospective. Interreg Aurora contributes by building durable cross-border networks, strengthening institutional and organisational capacity, and developing jointly created solutions with potential for continuation and scaling beyond project lifecycles. Observable long-term effects are expected to materialise after project completion and are dependent on follow-up funding, institutional anchoring and continued cooperation. This is particularly relevant for research-, innovation- and system-oriented operations.

9.1.4 Project results and their contribution to programme objectives and cross-border added value

The evaluation shows that projects generate results that are well aligned with the programme's intervention logic and overall objectives. Results range from concrete, user-facing services and tools to knowledge outputs, pilots and preparatory activities. Cross-border added value is consistently strong and manifested through joint knowledge production, pooling of critical mass, coordinated solutions and culturally and institutionally coherent approaches across borders. In many cases, results would not have been achievable, or would have been significantly weaker, without the cross-border framework provided by Interreg.

9.1.5 Objectives or results not yet achieved

Several objectives and results have not yet been achieved, largely due to the high share of ongoing projects and the time lag between outputs and results. Sustainable mobility (Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3) stands out as a clear underperforming area, characterised by a weak project pipeline, low indicator mobilisation and limited financial coverage. Without corrective action, the plausibility of achieving objectives in this area remains low.

9.1.6 Existing and potential partnerships

The programme is characterised by strong and recurring partnerships, primarily involving universities, research institutes and public authorities across Sweden, Finland and Norway. These partnerships contribute to stability, implementation efficiency and Union added value. At the same time, the evaluation identifies scope to broaden participation, particularly by increasing involvement of private enterprises, smaller organisations and new entrants. Such diversification could enhance innovation diversity and societal uptake of results.

9.1.7 Outreach to potential beneficiaries in sub-area Aurora and sub-area Sápmi

Interreg Aurora has successfully mobilised a substantial project portfolio across both sub-areas (the Aurora sub-area and the Sápmi sub-area). Outreach in the Sápmi sub-area has been particularly effective in thematic areas aligned with language, culture, education and societal capacity building. Nevertheless, persistent barriers remain for some potential beneficiaries, notably administrative complexity, co-financing requirements and language-related challenges, which disproportionately affect smaller actors.

9.1.8 Contribution to EU Arctic policy objectives

The programme contributes clearly to the main objectives of EU Arctic policy through strengthened international cooperation, climate- and environment-related knowledge development, and support for sustainable territorial development. Contributions are often indirect but strategically significant, emphasising capacity building, resilience, behavioural change and coordinated governance. One concrete example is the cooperation initiative with the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) programme, referred to as Interreg Arctic Cooperation, which strengthens coordination and joint learning across Arctic Interreg programmes. The programme's cross-border structure and focus on long-term societal challenges align well with the EU Arctic policy's emphasis on sustainability, environmental protection and cooperation.

9.2 Conclusions in relation to the evaluation criteria

Taken together, the evaluation concludes that Interreg Aurora is performing well in terms of relevance, coherence and Union added value, and shows satisfactory early effectiveness given the stage of the programming period. The programme has successfully operationalised its intervention logic and mobilised a substantial and strategically aligned project portfolio. The main challenges ahead relate not to strategic misalignment, but to delivery balance across objectives, long-term sustainability of results, and the need to strengthen weaker thematic areas. Addressing these issues proactively will be essential to maximise the programme’s contribution to long-term territorial development and cross-border value added by the end of the programming period.

Evaluation criterion	Main findings	Key risks / Issues
Relevance	The programme is highly relevant to territorial needs in the Aurora area and well aligned with EU Cohesion Policy and Arctic policy objectives. The Sápmi sub-area shows strong goal congruence, particularly in language, culture and capacity building.	Risk of thematic dilution if resources are spread across too many objectives, limiting critical mass and visibility of results.
Coherence	There is strong internal coherence between objectives, priorities and funded operations. The intervention logic is clearly translated into project selection and indicators, including a distinct and coherent Sápmi portfolio.	Risk that coherence weakens over time if project selection is not used to strategically consolidate priority result pathways.
Effectiveness	Early implementation performance is satisfactory , with strong mobilisation of outputs and rapid progress in governance and innovation-oriented objectives.	Uneven delivery across objectives. Environmental objectives progress more slowly, and sustainable mobility is clearly under-represented, posing a risk to overall effectiveness.
Union added value	The programme generates strong Union added value through durable cross-border partnerships, knowledge transfer and joint solutions that would not be achievable through national funding alone.	Heavy reliance on established public and academic networks may limit participation of new actors and reduce diversity of innovation and uptake.
Cross-border added value	Cross-border cooperation is structurally embedded , with extensive tri-national collaboration between Sweden, Finland and Norway.	Asymmetry in Norwegian participation (Norwegian beneficiaries funded through national IR support rather than EU co-financing) may increase governance and administrative complexity .
Long-term effects and results	The programme has created a strong foundation for long-term effects through capacity building, networks and jointly developed solutions.	Evidence of results is still limited; weak output mobilisation in some objectives (notably sustainable mobility) reduces the plausibility of long-term impact without corrective action.

9.2.1 Relevance

Based on the evidence reviewed, Interreg Aurora demonstrates a high degree of relevance in relation to the territorial needs and challenges identified for the programme area. The programme addresses key structural conditions of the northern and Arctic regions such as sparsity, long distances, limited critical mass and cross-border functional dependencies through a coherent set of priorities and specific objectives. The thematic composition of the project portfolio shows clear alignment with the programme's strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to innovation and smart specialisation, green transition, education, culture and social sustainability, and cross-border capacity building.

Relevance is further strengthened by the programme's territorially differentiated logic, notably the treatment of Sápmi as a distinct sub-area, where the portfolio is closely aligned with identified needs related to language revitalisation, cultural sustainability and institutional capacity. Overall, the programme's objectives remain well aligned with both EU Cohesion Policy and EU Arctic policy priorities, confirming continued strategic relevance at this stage of implementation.

9.2.2 Coherence

The analysis indicates a high level of internal coherence within the programme. There is a clear and consistent link between the overall programme objective, the priorities, the specific objectives and the funded operations. The portfolio demonstrates a focused intervention logic, with thematic concentrations that reflect deliberate strategic choices rather than fragmented project selection.

Coherence is particularly visible in the alignment between intervention fields, output indicators and selected operations, where the programme has mobilised a portfolio that is well positioned to deliver planned outputs across several objectives. The Sápmi sub-area further illustrates coherence, as projects are thematically concentrated and clearly differentiated from the broader portfolio, while still contributing to the programme's overarching goals. Some risks to coherence relate to thematic breadth and potential dilution over time, but at present the evidence points to a programme logic that is both internally consistent and operationally grounded.

9.2.3 Effectiveness

At this stage of the programming period, the programme shows signs of effective implementation, while acknowledging that many projects are still ongoing and that conclusions

on impacts must remain cautious. The pace of project selection and financial commitment is consistent with a implementation phase, and monitoring data indicate strong mobilisation of outputs across several specific objectives. In indicator terms, selected operations already cover or exceed planned output targets in areas such as research cooperation, jointly developed solutions, pilot actions and cross-border organisational cooperation.

However, effectiveness risks are also evident. Delivery is uneven across objectives, with governance and innovation-oriented interventions progressing faster, while environmental objectives particularly climate adaptation and biodiversity show lower completion levels. Sustainable mobility stands out as a clear underperformance, with a very limited project pipeline and weak indicator mobilisation. These patterns suggest that while upstream effectiveness (mobilisation and selection) is strong, downstream effectiveness will depend on timely delivery, strengthened pipeline steering and active risk management, especially for objectives with longer implementation cycles.

9.2.4 Union added value and cross-border value added

The programme generates strong Union added value, primarily through durable and institutionalised cross-border partnerships. The predominance of tri-national and recurrent cooperation structures enables joint solutions, knowledge transfer and trust-building that would be difficult to achieve through national or regional instruments alone. This is particularly evident in areas such as innovation ecosystems, governance, education and cultural cooperation, as well as in the Sápmi sub-area, where cross-border collaboration is intrinsic to addressing Indigenous societal challenges.

The partnership model also contributes positively to implementation efficiency, as established networks reduce coordination costs and support faster project start-up and delivery. At the same time, reliance on established academic and public-sector partnerships may limit the inflow of new actors, including private enterprises and smaller organisations, which could constrain the breadth of societal uptake over time. Norway's predominant role as a project partner rather than beneficiary reinforces the cross-border dimension but also introduces governance and administrative complexity that requires continued attention.

9.2.5 Contribution to long-term effects and results

The programme's contribution to long-term effects and results is, at this stage, primarily prospective rather than fully observable. Many projects are long-term, institutional or system-oriented in nature, and results such as uptake, scaling and sustained cooperation are expected to materialise after project completion. The evidence indicates that the programme has laid a strong foundation for long-term effects through capacity building, network formation and jointly developed solutions.

However, the translation of strong output performance into durable results will depend on effective exit strategies, follow-up mechanisms and continued cooperation beyond project lifecycles. Where output mobilisation is weak most notably in sustainable mobility the likelihood of achieving longer-term results is correspondingly lower unless corrective measures are taken.

9.3 Recommendations

Overall, the evaluation suggests that further strengthening Interreg Aurora's ambition is less a question of revisiting strategic priorities and more a matter of how implementation is steered, supported and consolidated over time. The programme has already mobilised a substantial and coherent portfolio and established robust cross-border partnerships that provide a solid foundation for delivery. As implementation progresses, the key challenge will be to ensure that this mobilisation translates into balanced delivery, durable results and visible cross-border value added across all priorities.

In this context, active portfolio management becomes increasingly important. This includes using calls, selection criteria and monitoring processes not only to approve individual projects, but to steer the portfolio towards stronger complementarities, clearer result pathways and greater critical mass within priority areas. Attention is warranted for objectives with longer delivery cycles or weaker pipelines, where early identification of delays and targeted support can reduce the risk of late or uneven achievement of results.

At the same time, the programme's strong reliance on established academic and public-sector partnerships has supported efficient delivery but also points to the need for progressively broadening participation. Strengthening the involvement of private actors, smaller organisations and new entrants—while maintaining manageable partnership sizes—would enhance both innovation diversity and societal uptake, thereby reinforcing Union added value.

Finally, to maximise long-term effects, greater emphasis should be placed on sustainability beyond project closure. Clearer exit strategies, follow-up mechanisms and continued support for uptake and scaling of results will be essential to ensure that strong output performance translates into lasting change. Taken together, these implementation-oriented adjustments can help ensure that Interreg Aurora fully realises its strategic ambitions and delivers sustained cross-border value by the end of the programming period.

9.3.1 Recommendations to the management level

Taken together, the actions presented below shift the programme from passive monitoring to active portfolio management. They build on measures already undertaken by the Managing Authority—on the mandate of the Monitoring Committee to strengthen inflow and

address pipeline gaps in selected areas, including targeted outreach to potential applicants, information campaigns, analysis of potential applicants and the use of selection incentives (e.g. additional points) to stimulate applications in under-represented fields. While these efforts have not, to date, produced the strengthening effect sought in all weak areas, early signals from Call 8 indicate a comparatively higher volume of applications under PO2, including in Priority 2 – Specific Objective 2.3. It is not yet possible to determine whether this reflects more effective targeted mobilisation and/or clearer signalling through the selection set-up, nor how many of these applications will ultimately be approved in summer 2026. The proposed actions do not require changes to the programme strategy, but rather a more deliberate and sustained use of calls, follow-up, partnership facilitation and communication to ensure balanced delivery, stronger Union added value and higher plausibility of long-term effects.

9.4 Conclusions regarding sub-area Sápmi

Overall, the analysis indicates that the Sápmi project portfolio within Interreg Aurora is strategically focused and internally coherent. The portfolio demonstrates a high degree of alignment between programme objectives, Sápmi specific priorities and implemented activities, particularly in the areas of language revitalisation, culture, education and societal capacity building. This alignment constitutes a strong indication of relevance and appropriateness at the current stage of implementation. The programme's strategic contribution is primarily reflected in its capacity building and system-oriented approach rather than in short term quantitative outcomes. By addressing long term and structural challenges—such as endangered languages, limited access to public services in Sámi languages and fragmented governance across national borders—the programme responds effectively to the specific conditions and needs of the Sápmi area. While the portfolio shows high goal congruence and a well-defined intervention logic, it is premature to draw firm conclusions regarding results and impacts. Many projects are long term, institutional in nature and oriented towards behavioural and structural change, which limits the availability of evidence for impact assessment at this stage. Consequently, the programme's effectiveness can currently be assessed primarily in terms of strategic direction and coherence rather than measurable outcomes.

9.5 Recommendations – sub-area Sápmi

Based on the analysis, the following formative recommendations are proposed to the programme organisation.

First, the programme should maintain and further clarify the strategic focus for Sápmi. The strong goal congruence observed within the Sápmi portfolio constitutes a key strength. Continued communication is needed to ensure that Sápmi is clearly understood

as a distinct sub area with its own development logic, rather than as an area expected to reflect the full thematic breadth of the programme.

Second, the programme should strengthen the monitoring of long term and qualitative outcomes. Given the nature of many Sápmi projects, greater emphasis should be placed on indicators related to capacity building, institutional cooperation, and linguistic and cultural sustainability. This would improve the programme's ability to capture meaningful progress beyond short term output measures.

Third, the programme organisation should more clearly articulate the indirect contributions of Sápmi projects to green and smart objectives. Even where projects do not fall directly under Priority 1 or Priority 2, clearer narrative linkages to sustainable land use, resilience and placebased innovation would strengthen the overall intervention logic.

Finally, the programme should ensure a continued balance between thematic depth and breadth. Regular reflection is recommended to assess whether the current strong thematic concentration within the Sápmi portfolio remains appropriate over time, or whether complementary interventions may be needed to address emerging or changing needs within the Sápmi area.

Appendix

The appendix below presents the 12 operations used as illustrative cases in the in-depth study. Each operation is presented in terms of its scope and activities, reported results, target groups and goal achievement, to the extent that these elements can be substantiated in the available evidence base.

FAIR 2 is a project working to find innovations to accelerate implementation of electric regional aviation. The project delivered a substantial evidence base and stakeholder process around demand for sustainable regional aviation, including results dissemination through events and communication activities. The informant frames the project's core result as an "extensive and unique knowledge base" on demand for sustainable regional aviation in Northern Nordics, specifically cross-border Sweden–Finland routes, including a demand study, updated business survey and operator/investor-oriented material. They also stress that results indicate positive attitudes and willingness to pay, but that public involvement is needed for implementation given limited commercial viability for many routes.

According to the informant, results are already used as a decision and dialogue basis to move from analysis toward implementation, and the project has created new cross-border cooperation "contact surfaces" among public actors, airports, development organisations and business representatives.

The informant assesses that project goals were achieved and that some indicators were exceeded. Importantly, the informant points to a clear continuation pathway via a planned follow-up (FAIR 3) focused on governance/legal and procurement models (i.e., moving from evidence to implementation instruments).

Risks to programme contribution is stressed to be external dependency: implementation requires political coordination, financing and procurement models beyond the project itself.

Girku SOS – Northern Sámi Helpline (Suicide prevention) is implemented as part of Kirkens SOS/Kyrkans SOS, offering a free, anonymous written support service; usage increased notably after a mobile app launch. The informant explains that the service design was anchored in a prior needs assessment (survey in three Sámi languages and dialogue with ~100 organisations) and that a written (chat/email) solution was chosen due to volunteer capacity constraints for a phone line.

The project has report 200+ contacts in the first year, exceeding the target of 150, and emphasise that the service is now in regular operations in both Norway and Sweden. The informant further highlights cross-border network building across Sápmi and visibility efforts (schools, media, influencers, collaborations) as important results from the project.

The informant underlines likely long-term effects (e.g., saving lives and strengthening mental health), while stressing that trust-building takes time in Sámi communities and that current use still leaves capacity for growth.

Further, the informant assesses goal achievement as high/very high, citing operationalisation, app development, integration into regular services and achieved/overachieved usage targets. Sustainability depends on multi-year funding and continued outreach; staffing with Sámi language/cultural competence is highlighted as important for scaling and a principal risk if it is not solved.

The final reporting of **Borderless Game Academy – Cross-border game education** describes cross-border curriculum development, student collaboration activities, and an education product intended to persist beyond the project. The informant reports a concrete and functioning outcome: a Game Arts education launched at Novia, designed so students do not need a full four-year path to obtain a bachelor's degree, addressing degree recognition and mobility constraints. The informant also describes active cross-border student collaborations as important resultat e.g., programming + feedback loops; multidisciplinary projects combining VFX, music, etc.). Demand is indicated as high: 140 applicants for 12 places (informant statement), with Swedish applicant numbers lower than expected but expected to improve after the first cohort and stronger marketing proof points.

The informant expects longer-term effects via deeper collaboration not only with Visual Magic but potentially other Swedish providers, plus stronger ties to regional game companies and entrepreneurship pathways. However, the informant stress the need for continued external expertise inputs and that further funding applications (including Interreg) are important to build the ecosystem.

The informant states goals are achieved. The informant also underlines that the note outreach is strong in core areas (Ostrobothnia/Västerbotten) but weaker in Sápmi, except via digitally enabled formats such as Global Game Jam.

Main risks relate to (i) sustaining momentum and (ii) achieving broader geographic uptake; the informant frames continued funding as important to consolidate the cross-border education pathway.

ICH North – Passing on our musical heritage: Project reporting describes a suite of open-access outputs: MOOC, digital map, multilingual educational materials, heritage/tourism entrepreneurship tools, and guidance for archives and community involvement.

One informant emphasises: strengthened visibility of tradition music in northern Nordics; a stronger cross-border network; and ethically sound access to heritage, particularly for Sámi music contexts as important results They highlight two durable products: the MOOC

and an interactive digital map. One informant confirm that quantitative targets are largely met, noting only that MOOC publication timing slipped due to underestimating compilation time as sub-results arrived late. A second informant stresses both planned and unplanned outcomes: multilingual educational material, archive community-involvement guidance, the digital map portraying diverse transmission practices, and an open MOOC. They highlight that the work sometimes required adaptive interpretation across partners, and that translations/layout were time consuming; not all language versions were feasible within time/resources.

Both informants identify the core effect as durable cross-border networks and stronger community/institution capacity. Sustainability is anchored through institutional hosting of the MOOC and continued upkeep of the map by responsible organisations.

Risks related to the projects results relate primarily to (i) ongoing maintenance and institutional anchoring (explicitly noted by informants) and (ii) representational/ethical sensitivity, particularly in indigenous contexts, requiring continued careful practice.

Reporting documents from the project **OFFwind – Offshore Wind Turbine Farms** present outputs such as technical reports on offshore wind overview, environmental conditions for Korsnäs, gravity-based foundations, ice–structure interaction modelling, de/anti-icing challenges, and economic feasibility models, dissemination via a project website, highlights and final webinar recording

The informant frames the project's major contribution as a comprehensive knowledge base on potential offshore wind areas and conditions in the region (Baltic and Norwegian shelf), including a concrete foundation concept for ice conditions and analyses of ice loading and construction mechanics. The informant stress that the project clarified that costs are very high in northern areas, especially for floating offshore wind in deep waters, and that market uptake is constrained by the capital intensity and political/market conditions. The informant also states deliverables were produced as planned but distinguishes clearly between achieving project outputs and accelerating deployment (which depends on subsidies, market prices and policy).

According to the informant a key programme-level risk is that strong technical outputs may not translate into deployment within the programme period due to external constraints (investment scale, market and policy). This risk is explicitly articulated by the informant.

Final reporting documents from the project GreenBattery – Sustainable battery components extensive technical progress and dissemination (including open-access publications and a popular science report), and highlights research advances across anode/cathode/electrolyte components plus TEA/LCA work. The informant highlights: strong cross-border learning (regional actors building battery competence), 13 published articles (plus one pending), and strengthened collaboration among partners, with interest in continuing

in follow-up proposals. The informant also flag one limitation: the economic/environmental assessments (TEA/LCA) were constrained because research data reached analysts late, requiring more general assumptions than desired.

Goal achievement is described as high, with results exceeding initial expectations in research substance and team performance. The informant emphasises uncertainty about longer-term impacts due to external market/regulatory developments, consistent with the project's R&I nature.

Risk relates to translation from research outputs to scalable industrial uptake and to the quality of economic/environmental assessments when data availability is late in the project cycle.

Regarding the project **Summation – Sustainable Autonomous Systems and Solutions** the informant highlights practical case demonstrations using drones (e.g., snow measurement, reindeer-related applications, biodiversity mapping), digital maps/digital twins, and strong dissemination via open publication channels. The informant assesses targets as achieved and underline that the main effect is inspiring SMEs and lowering the threshold for adoption of technologies perceived as new or inaccessible. The informant also note continuation is fragmented parts continue in other settings, with partners planning new applications, while the original group may disperse.

Key risk is according to the informant continuity: maintaining momentum and follow-up implementation once the consortium disperses, typical for pilot/demonstration projects.

The informant describes the major outputs from the project **SAMHand – Sustainable Autonomous Material Handling** as (i) a system-level report on multimodal sustainable transport/material handling, (ii) methods for testing and simulation of autonomous work machines, (iii) life-cycle assessment comparing conventional vs new solutions, and (iv) demos with industry actors. The informant stress that commercialization and SME uptake are longer-term and partly outside the project's control, with one indicator relating to successful funding applications not fully reached due to capacity limits. The informant also highlights administrative burdens and co-financing constraints as barriers for partners—especially universities—affecting participation.

Programme-related risks are according to the informant mainly scaling and partner inclusion: co-financing and complex application requirements may constrain participation and limit breadth of partnerships in follow-up phases.

Eco-Lib (EcoLIB) – Recycling of spent lithium-ion batteries reports from the documentation extensive R&I work packages and outputs (thermal pre-treatment, separation, hydrometallurgy, electrochemical testing, open-access publications). The informant summary that two of three result indicators were achieved: high graphite recovery/purity (~98 percent

and near-commercial quality), cobalt recovery achieved, while electrolyte recovery for reuse was not fully achieved due to sensitivity—though the work generated valuable open-access scientific knowledge. The informant notes uncertainties about continued industry collaboration (e.g., changing industrial context) and indicates intention to use core results as a basis for a Horizon application.

Main risks are relate to industrial continuity and scaling, and to the “last mile” of certain processes (electrolyte reuse). The informant frames this as a technical challenge.

Reports regarding the projects **ISSUES – Cybersecurity and information security support for SMEs** shows extensive outreach activities, tools, and dissemination via cyber-north.se, including CyberAkuten and learning tools; continued upkeep is part of the exit strategy. The informant stresses the importance of event series and low-threshold engagement formats to reach SMEs, and highlights the complementarity between a more applied partner (Centria) and a more academic partner (LTU). The informant also notes persistent difficulty in reaching the smallest firms (time constraints, limited awareness of risks), which motivated the use of “light” exercises to spark interest. The informant also note that programme administrators sometimes struggle to interpret technical indicators for such solutions, illustrating a monitoring/communication challenge rather than delivery failure.

Risks relate to SME engagement depth (time constraints) and the potential under-capture of impacts due to indicator interpretation issues for technical/behavioural tools. v

The project **ClimateFood – Climate-smart food systems** reporting documents a dashboard, interviews and reports, case examples, events and dissemination, plus action plans and cooperation agreements. The informant highlights that the project: (i) identified climate-smart behaviours already used by SMEs; (ii) produced a public dashboard showing production structure, strengths/weaknesses and environmental burden; and (iii) delivered an interview-based report on meanings and practices of climate-smartness and the demand for cross-border cooperation. The informant confirm that indicators were achieved and that two cooperation plans were produced and are active. However, the informant also underline the challenge of engaging busy entrepreneurs; participation was achieved but required sustained effort, and long-term collaboration is seen as dependent on continued funding and networking maintenance. The informant note that the dashboard likely will not be updated after the project ends, even if networks persist.

Risks within the project are mainly sustainability-related: maintaining tools (dashboard updates) and ensuring ongoing collaboration and uptake without continued project-based financing.

The project **SeaMoreEco – Marine biodiversity monitoring, restoration and conservation** is describe by the informant as a Finland–Sweden cooperation developing and demonstrating methods for monitoring, restoration and biodiversity conservation in shallow

coastal areas in Northern Bothnian Bay, using drones, satellite imagery and field measurements, and producing new maps and data that are made available for planning and monitoring. The informant emphasises being “most satisfied with the cooperation” and the tools produced, describing Interreg as the connector enabling collaboration, and states project goals are achieved.

They point to sustainability via data being stored in existing databases and a map portal with secured financing for future years, while noting that publication and website hosting after project end can be challenging unless institutional solutions exist.

According to the informant the risks relate from the projects are related to long-term hosting/publication arrangements and continued monitoring funding, rather than technical relevance or delivery.

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