

## Indicative Guidance on ESF Evaluation Quality Standards

### Introduction

This non-prescriptive document proposes to Member States the application of the following quality standards in relation to ESF evaluation processes. In applying these standards, Member States should evidently take account of the specific features of their management systems, administrative and political set up and traditions. This document will be a useful checklist of the wide range of issues that ESF managers, particularly in Member States with less experience of evaluation, need to consider with regard to capacity development and evaluation.

The aim of the guidance is to complement Working Document no.5, *Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Evaluation during the Programming Period* and other papers on Evaluation Methods<sup>1</sup> developed with DG Regio. It is also linked with methodological work within the ESF Evaluation Partnership<sup>2</sup>. Together they fulfil the obligation (as laid down in article 47(5) of the General Regulation<sup>3</sup>) for "*the Commission [to] provide guidance on evaluation methods, including quality standards [...]*" and for the Commission to provide "*improvements in evaluation methods and the exchange of information on practices in this field*" in line with article 45(1)(g) of the same General Regulation.

As stipulated by the General Regulation, evaluations "*shall aim to improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the assistance from the Funds and the strategy and implementation of the operational programmes*"<sup>4</sup>. The evaluations shall be carried out before, during and after the programming period. The evaluations may be of strategic (if they examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes related to Community or national priorities) or operational (if they support the monitoring of an operational programme)<sup>5</sup>.

This reflects a significant modification in the general approach to evaluation compared to the 2000-2006 period. There is a shift away from mid-term evaluation driven by regulatory imperatives towards 'demand-driven' evaluation that allows for more flexibility in terms of scope and timing. The new focus encourages conducting evaluations that are adapted to Member States' needs. Monitoring and evaluation together should be seen as an integrated management tool that is helpful in the delivery of the objectives set by the OPs.

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<sup>1</sup> In particular the following *Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Working Document: no. 1: Ex ante Evaluation and Working Document no. 5: Evaluation during the Programming period*

<sup>2</sup> Since the early 90s, the ESF Evaluation Partnership has been the major forum for discussions between MS and the Commission on ESF evaluation issues. See also Annex 2.

<sup>3</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999

<sup>4</sup> Article 47 (1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<sup>5</sup> Article 47 (2) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

The 27 Member States in which the OPs take place have very different administrative traditions and institutional and political structures. ESF Operational Programmes reflect this diversity. This can be seen for instance in the number of OPs per MS (ranging between one national OP to over 20 mostly regional OPs). It is even more evident in the size of the Community contribution: the largest reaching nearly 10 billion Euros, about 800 times bigger than the smallest. It is essential to take this diversity into account. The proportionality principle<sup>6</sup> has therefore been a guiding principle in the elaboration of this document.

In addition to the "Indicative Guidance on ESF Evaluation Quality Standards" ESF managers are encouraged to consult other valuable sources of information that reflect the issues related to the evaluation standards, such as:

- The framework for analysis of evaluation capacity, which has been developed on the basis of work commissioned by DG REGIO's Evaluation Unit. Indicators included in the framework highlight different aspects of evaluation capacity and identify areas in need of improvement. The framework is available on the "Inforegio" website at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/report\\_integrated\\_2007.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/report_integrated_2007.pdf)
- A tool for describing information systems and monitoring arrangements in a standardized manner. It is the result of the *Evaluation of information systems and monitoring arrangements for the programmes supported by the ESF*, commissioned by DG EMPL's Evaluation Unit and proposes a set of criteria for the analysis of monitoring systems, such as: quality of the information, reliability of the system, quality of the information architecture and costs. The study is available on the Europa website at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2202&langId=en>

This document is composed of four sections: (i) **evaluation environment**, which addresses MS responsibilities in organising the evaluation process; (ii) **evaluation planning**, which stresses the necessity of scheduling evaluations and recommends a strong link between monitoring and evaluation; (iii) **implementing evaluations** where the steps in the evaluation process are spelt out (iv) **disseminating and using of evaluations outcomes**, which discusses how to deal with evaluation results. Overall, the material presented is an attempt to operationalize the ideas presented in Working Paper No.5.

Each section provides a good practice example and suggests interpreting and implementing requirements. Examples from MS show that these quality standards can be met in different ways<sup>7</sup>. The examples given are based on an overview of NSRFs, ESF Operational Programmes, and evaluation plans for 2007-2013 as well as experience from the 2000-2006 programming period. Finally, quotes from the General and ESF Regulations are provided in Annex 1 and the Mandate of the ESF Evaluation Partnership in Annex 2.

## 1. EVALUATION ENVIRONMENT

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<sup>6</sup> Article 13 (1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<sup>7</sup> The actual MS and OP are not mentioned.

This section addresses the issue of establishing an adequate institutional framework for the effective management of ESF evaluation that comprises both human and financial resources. It is in line with both Regulations and Working Paper No.5 which also defines the role of different institutions involved in the OP evaluation.

### **1.1. *Proposals for quality standards***

<b>Evaluation activities should be appropriately targeted according to their purposes</b>
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- There should be an evaluation function with a clearly defined responsibility for coordinating, monitoring and promoting the quality of evaluation activities throughout the whole evaluation cycle;
- This evaluation function should be free from undue influence so that an unbiased and transparent evaluation process and reporting is ensured;
- There should be a clear agreement on the tasks, responsibilities, organization and procedures for all stakeholders involved in evaluation activities throughout the evaluation cycle, particularly OP Managing Authority, Implementing Bodies and Monitoring Committee.

<b>The evaluation function should be adequately resourced to ensure quality outcomes</b>
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- The human and financial resources available to the evaluation function should be appropriate (proportional) to the scope of evaluation activities foreseen. These resources may be external or internal to the evaluation function itself;
- The persons engaged in evaluation should possess core evaluation competencies, such as relevant educational background, qualifications, skills, and experience in designing, conducting and managing evaluation activities.
- The training needs of the evaluation function should be adequately met through, for example, seminars, workshops, self-study and working with other evaluators.

### **1.2. *Examples from relevant practice in MS***

#### **Organisation of the evaluation function:**

A preliminary overview of NSRFs, ESF Operational Programmes, and evaluation plans for 2007-2013 as well as experience from the 2000-2006 programming period reveals that the location of the ESF evaluation function varies widely across Member States. It depends on the ESF management and implementation system and reflects different institutional settings in the Member States. The analysis below is not exhaustive, but focuses on the main types of institutional settings.

- 1) The ESF evaluation function is centralised in one level of SF management, for example:

- a. A distinct ESF evaluation function is created for each ESF OP. This applies both to countries where the ESF is implemented through a single ESF OP and also to countries where it is implemented through several OPs but where there is no "umbrella" ESF evaluation function. In these cases, the ESF evaluation function may be located within or outside the structure of an OP Managing Authority, depending on the management system envisaged for each OP.
- b. A single ESF evaluation function is created for all ESF interventions in cases where there are several ESF OPs. The location of such a function depends on the management system envisaged for ESF funding in a Member State. For instance, if there is a single ESF Managing Authority covering all ESF OPs, an evaluation function may be located within this structure. The other example is to have a separate ESF evaluation function within an institution co-ordinating several OPs, both ESF and ERDF.
- c. No separate ESF evaluation function is envisaged. In this case ESF evaluations are performed by the the Structural Funds evaluation function at national level, which would undertake research in both ESF and ERDF areas. This SF evaluation function may be located within or outside the institution that coordinates the implementation of SF, e.g. Managing Authority common to all SF OPs or a NSRF level coordination commission.

2) The ESF evaluation function is spread over different levels and/or institutions involved in SF management, for example:

- a. A distinct ESF evaluation function is created for each ESF OP and the evaluation process is organised independently for each ESF OP.
- b. A distinct ESF evaluation function is created for each ESF OP but there is also an "umbrella" ESF evaluation function which oversees the whole ESF evaluation process. This set-up is used in some Member States where regional OPs complement one or more national ones.
- c. Evaluation functions are created below the level of the OP, for instance for each Priority and implemented by different Intermediary Bodies. In this case there is also an "umbrella" ESF evaluation function which oversees the whole process of ESF evaluation.

The allocation of human resources varies between Member States and Operational Programmes. The two main factors influencing this are the institutional setting and scope of ESF interventions, in particular the number and size of the OPs. The human resources allocated to the ESF evaluation functions ranges from one person in cases of a single central ESF evaluation function for one relatively small OP, to well over 20 people in cases where the ESF evaluation function is located across different (national and regional ESF) OPs with supervision or coordination by a central (ESF) evaluation function at national level.

### **The role of the Monitoring Committee:**

Monitoring Committees can play two different roles in evaluation:

- 1) The Monitoring Committee is involved in evaluation activities throughout the evaluation cycle. In particular, it participates in the planning of evaluation activities by proposing themes for evaluation and approving evaluation plans or strategies. Internal procedures also allow the MC to recommend or in certain cases even demand an evaluation be carried out. When an evaluation has been completed, the MC considers the recommendations of the evaluation report and if it finds them justified, acts on them. Additionally, in some cases the members of the MC sit on the evaluation steering committees.
- 2) The Monitoring Committee is only involved in evaluation activities at the reporting and follow-up stage. It considers the recommendations and decides upon their implementation.

### **Evaluation capacity building:**

Evaluation capacity building is understood as a process of creating factors that support development of evaluation system and use of evaluation in the public of government sector. This may involve:

- 1) Capacity building focused on the demand side. It then takes the form of general training for administration officials, mainly those responsible for monitoring and evaluation.
- 2) Capacity building focused on both the demand and the supply side. Such a dual approach consists on developing the building capacity on the demand side by awareness-raising, technical know-how and use of evaluation results as well as on the supply side by networking, market development (workshops, conferences, training etc) and technical know-how.

## **2. PLANNING EVALUATION**

This section concerns evaluation planning which includes not only following the evaluation cycle, but also carrying out operational and strategic evaluations during OP implementation. In this respect, both the Regulations and Working Document No.5 underline that planning of evaluation is crucial. In particular, Working Paper No.5 recommends establishing an evaluation plan, which provides an overall framework for ongoing evaluation. The Guidance document develops this issue further, underlining an important link between monitoring and the planning process of evaluation.

### **2.1. *Proposals for quality standards***

<p><b>Evaluation activities should be planned in a transparent and consistent way so that relevant evaluation results are available in due time for operational and strategic decision-making and reporting needs</b></p>
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- It is essential that proper consideration is given to the need to assess the contribution of the ESF to the implementation of the national and European priorities, in the line with the European Employment Strategy and the Community objectives in the field of

social inclusion, non-discrimination and equality between women and men, and education and training;

- The planning process for evaluation should be undertaken in a timely manner and should preferably:
  - a. take proper consideration of the partnership principle, for instance when setting-up a steering group for each evaluation exercise. The composition of such steering groups should be adjusted to the specific needs of each evaluation;
  - b. take account of the proportionality principle but also of the expected impact of the object being evaluated. Interventions which are expected to have a larger and more lasting impact should be evaluated with even greater care;
  - c. take into account the strategic or operational nature of the evaluation;
  - d. involve the institutions that might have to act on the recommendations (e.g.: monitoring committee or managing authority);
  - e. take into account evaluation commitments made in the NSRF and Operational Programme, as well as the need to evaluate the communication plan;
  - f. lead to drafting an **evaluation plan**.
  
- **Evaluation plans:**
  - a. may be annual or multi-annual with regular updates. When updates are planned, the mechanism for revision should be described;
  - b. should reflect the nature of the planned ESF activities;
  - c. should describe the co-ordination arrangements for the ongoing evaluation process;
  - d. could include the following (depending on the plan's timeline): indicative list of evaluations to be carried out (internally and externally); scope of each evaluation and main evaluation questions to be considered; potential use of evaluation; financial resources planned for each evaluation and indicative timetable; and a description of the evaluation management structure.

<b>Strong link between monitoring and ongoing evaluation should be ensured</b>
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- The monitoring system should be able to generate the information required to track progress in achieving financial and physical targets agreed in the OP. Monitoring systems can also generate result indicators. In other cases, the result indicators are collected through evaluation;
  
- There should be a function committed to analysing monitoring data. This function recommends carrying out an evaluation when monitoring data indicates that actual or potential problems in programme implementation arise.

## **2.2. Examples from relevant practice in MS**

### **Coverage of Evaluation Plan:**

The coverage of evaluation plans tends to mirror the organisation of ESF evaluation functions in Member States.

- 1) In countries where the ESF evaluation function is centralised in one level of SF management, the evaluation plan:
  - a. can cover each ESF OP separately;
  - b. can cover all ESF interventions (several OPs);
  - c. can cover all SF interventions (ERDF and ESF OPs);
- 2) In countries where a distinct ESF evaluation function is created for each ESF OP, evaluation plans are drafted independently and cover each ESF OP separately.
- 3) In countries where the ESF evaluation function is spread over different levels or institutions involved in SF management, but there is an "umbrella" ESF evaluation function, separate plans can be drafted for each level (e.g. region) or institution (Intermediate Body). These plans are then co-ordinated by an "umbrella" ESF evaluation function which ensures its coherence with the overall ESF evaluation strategy.

### **Design and approval of the Evaluation Plan or Strategy:**

The ESF evaluation functions are responsible for the design of the evaluation plans or strategies.

- 1) In countries where the ESF evaluation function is centralised in one level of SF management, the evaluation plan can be designed by:
  - a. the ESF evaluation function for each OP whether it is located within or outside the Managing Authority;
  - b. the ESF evaluation function for all ESF intervention;
  - c. the SF evaluation function;
- 2) In countries where the ESF evaluation function is spread over different levels or institutions involved in SF management, separate evaluation plans can be designed by the institutions involved in the implementation of the OP (e.g. Intermediate Body).

Usually the Evaluation Plan or Strategy is submitted and discussed by either the OP Monitoring Committee or some SF or NSRF coordination authority. It is then approved by the OP Managing Authority.

### **Revision of the evaluation plan/strategy:**

The ESF evaluation functions are responsible for the revision of evaluation plans or strategies, when the scope of the documents exceed annual planning.

- 1) Revisions or updates of multi annual evaluations plans or strategies can be planned annually;

- 2) Revisions or updates of multi annual evaluations plans or strategies can be made subject to changes in the implementation contexts.

### **3. IMPLEMENTING EVALUATIONS**

This section guides the conduct of evaluations. Supplemental information on process of evaluation may be also found in Working Document No.5 of the European Commission and in publications of other organisations such as: United Nations Evaluation Group, The World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, OECD and several evaluation societies.

In particular, Working Paper No. 5 states that "in undertaking evaluation tasks, the managing authorities should use, where appropriate, external expertise through evaluation contracts or their own internal evaluation capacity". To this end, the managing authorities may establish either framework contracts covering the entire programming period, or single contracts for specific evaluations. It is also recommended to establish steering groups for each evaluation in order to enhance both the independence and the quality of evaluation processes and reports.

#### **3.1. *Proposals for quality standards***

<b>Evaluation design should provide clear and specific objectives and appropriate methods and means for managing the evaluation process and its results</b>
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- Terms of Reference should be established for each external evaluation and a corresponding document or mandate should be established for each internal evaluation. These documents should clearly and accurately define at least the following points: purpose and objectives, budget, key questions, scope, expected outputs, deadlines, and quality criteria. For external evaluations, the Terms of Reference should also mention contractual, financial and administrative clauses.

<b>Evaluation activities should be coordinated by a steering group</b>
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- An evaluation steering group should be set up. This may entail:
  - a. setting-up a permanent steering group for the evaluations of a given Operational Programme or group of programmes;
  - b. establishing ad-hoc evaluation steering groups for individual studies.
- The composition of the steering group should be adjusted to the specific needs and circumstances of each evaluation.
- The steering group plays an advisory role in the implementation of evaluations. In particular it:
  - a. advises on terms of reference or mandate;



- b. supports the evaluation work, for instance by facilitating access to the documentation and data required for evaluation purposes; and
  - c. regularly assesses the quality of the deliverables.
- It is important that the steering group performs its task in compliance with the rules on conflict of interest.

<b>Evaluation activities should be conducted in a professional and ethical manner</b>
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- The evaluation should be conducted in such a way that:
  - a. the results are supported by evidence and methodologically rigorous analysis;
  - b. there is impartiality, i.e. absence of bias in due process, and there should be consultation of stakeholders at all stages of the evaluation process;
  - c. evaluators are independent, i.e. free to present their results without compromise or interference although they should take account of the steering group's comments on evaluation quality and accuracy;
  - d. evaluators must not have been directly responsible for the policy development, design or overall management of the subject of evaluation.

<b>The evaluation report should provide reliable, robust and complete results</b>
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- Clear principles for reporting are one factor contributing to quality evaluation;
- The quality of the evaluation should be assessed, throughout the evaluation process, on the basis of the pre-established criteria and the quality criteria should as a minimum relate to relevant scope, appropriate methods, reliable data, sound analysis, credible results, useful conclusions and clarity of the deliverables;
- The final evaluation report, as a minimum, should set out the purpose, context, objectives, questions, information sources, methods used, evidence, findings and recommendations. The evaluation methods used must be clearly explained in a methodology section of the report. This should include how the sample was derived, the data collection methods (questionnaires should be included as an annex to the main report), issues encountered in the data collection (biases) and the implication of these on the final results and conclusions;
- The evaluation report should present in a complete and balanced way the evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations;
- It is common practice that the evaluation report includes an executive summary that encapsulates the essence of the information contained in the report, and facilitates dissemination of evaluation results;
- The reports should comply with agreed deadlines.

### **3.2. Examples from relevant practice in MS**

#### **Evaluation Steering Group:**

Member States commonly use evaluation steering groups in their evaluation activities. However, their role depends on the institutional setting of the evaluation function and this varies between countries:

- 1) A permanent steering group is set up: a steering group established for the entire programming period.
- 2) Ad-hoc steering group: established to set terms of references for individual evaluations and to exercise quality control in relation to them.

#### **Internal and external evaluations**

Member States differ in their procedures of conducting evaluation. There are two main approaches:

- 1) All ESF evaluations are contracted to external experts. This outsourcing can be done as follows:
  - a. through the signature of a framework contract for external evaluation covering the entire programming period.
  - b. or each evaluation is commissioned separately.
- 2) ESF evaluations are carried out using both internal and external experts but in some cases, projects that exceed a defined ceiling or are related to innovation can be commissioned from external experts.

## **4. DISSEMINATING AND USING OF EVALUATION OUTCOMES**

This section deals with the Regulatory requirement for allowing public access to evaluation results and the need for a clear strategy to ensure appropriate dissemination of evaluation outcomes to different audiences.

### **4.1. Proposals for quality standards**

<b>Evaluation results should be communicated in such a way that they meet the needs of decision-makers and stakeholders and are used to as a great degree as possible</b>
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- Systematic dissemination of evaluation results is essential for ensuring improved planning and implementation of the ESF interventions;
- Evaluation results should be communicated:

- a. effectively to all relevant decision-makers and parties;
  - b. to the public in general;
- Evaluation results, and in particular recommendations, should be examined by the institution that commissioned the evaluation. It should then decide which of the recommendations need follow-up actions and by whom and in what time frame;
  - One essential part of the evaluation process is to ensure a systematic follow up to recommendations that have been accepted.

## **4.2. Examples from relevant practice in MS**

### **Dissemination techniques:**

Evaluation results may be disseminated in several complementary ways:

- 1) Evaluation reports are made available to the general public through the websites of the evaluation function;
- 2) Executive summaries of the evaluation reports are circulated to stakeholders;
- 3) Evaluation reports are presented and discussed during meetings with stakeholders, for example at Monitoring Committee meetings;
- 4) Evaluation results are disseminated without the evaluation report itself, e.g. annual reports providing a synthesis of findings, abstracts/summaries providing a synopsis of findings.

### **Provisions for follow-up of recommendations:**

Follow-up of recommendation may be organised in different ways:

- 1) Actors to whom recommendations are addressed must answer explaining how they will react.
- 2) One institution is explicitly entrusted with monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

## ANNEX 1 – Regulatory Basis

The following section outlines articles from the General and ESF Regulations, which are relevant to ESF evaluation and monitoring process. The organisation of the Annex mirrors the structure of the Guidance.

### 1. EVALUATION ENVIRONMENT

- "The partnership shall cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage".  
*(Article 11(2) of the General Regulation)*
- "The Member States shall provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations..."  
*(Article 48(1) of the General Regulation)*
- "...Evaluations shall be carried out by experts or bodies, internal or external, functionally independent of the authorities referred to in Article 59(b) and (c)..."  
*(Article 47(3) of the General Regulation)*
- "The managing authority shall be responsible for [...] ensuring that the evaluations of operational programmes referred to in article 48(3) are carried out in accordance with article 47".  
*(Article 60(e) of the General Regulation)*
- "The managing authority shall be responsible [...] for ensuring that there is a system for recording and storing in computerised form accounting records for each operation under the operational programme and that the data on implementation necessary for financial management, monitoring, verifications, audits and evaluations are collected".  
*(Article 60(c) General Regulation)*

### 2. PLANNING OF EVALUATION

- "The partnership shall cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage".  
*(Article 11(2) of the General Regulation)*
- "[...] operational programmes may be re-examined and, if necessary, the remainder of the programme revised [...] in the light of the evaluation referred to in Article 48(3)".  
*(Article 33(1)(c) of the General Regulation)*
- "Evaluations may be of a strategic nature in order to examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes in relation to Community and national priorities,

or of an operational nature in order to support the monitoring of an operational programme".

*(Article 47(2) of the General Regulation)*

- "Evaluations shall be carried out before, during and after the programming period".  
*(Article 47(2) of the General Regulation)*
- "The Member States [...] organise the production and gathering of the necessary data and use the various types of information provided by the monitoring system".  
*(Article 48(1) of the General Regulation)*
- "[...] the Member States shall carry out evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes in particular where that monitoring reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set or where proposals are made for revision of operational programmes".  
*(Article 48(3) of the General Regulation)*
- "Evaluations undertaken in relation to ESF action shall also assess the contribution of the actions supported by the ESF to the implementation of the European Employment Strategy and to the Community objectives in the fields of social inclusion, non-discrimination and equality between women and men, and education and training in the Member State concerned".  
*(Article 4(5) of the ESF Regulation)*
- "The communication plan shall include at least the following; [...] (e) an indication of how the information and publicity measures are to be evaluated in terms of visibility and awareness of operational programmes and of the role played by the Community".  
*(Article 2(2)(e) of the SF Implementation Regulation)*

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION**

The Regulations do not make any direct reference to how concrete evaluation exercises are managed.

### **4. DISSEMINATION AND UTILISATION OF EVALUATION OUTCOMES**

- "The partnership shall cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage"  
*(Article 11(2) of the General Regulation).*
- "The results [of the evaluations] shall be published according to the rules on access to documents"  
*(Article 47(3) of the General Regulation).*

- The monitoring committee "shall examine the results of implementation, particularly the achievements of the targets set for each priority axis and the evaluation referred to in Article 48(3)"

*(Article 65(c) of the General Regulation)*

- "[the annual report and the final report on implementation] shall include [...] the steps taken by the managing authority or the monitoring committee to ensure the quality and effectiveness of implementation, in particular: monitoring and evaluation measures, including data collection arrangements"

*(Article 67(2)(d)(i) of the General Regulation).*

# **ANNEX 2 – Mandate of the ESF Evaluation Partnership**

## **1. Context and objectives**

The ESF Evaluation Partnership has since the early 1990s been the major forum for Member States and the Commission to discuss ESF evaluation.

In the context of the strategic reporting requirements laid-down in articles 29 & 30 of the General Regulation, the main objectives of the ESF Evaluation Partnership during the 2007-2013 programming period are:

1. to steer and capitalise on evaluation work of actions supported by the ESF with a view
2. to assess the contribution of actions supported by the ESF to objectives also pursued by other EU instruments (such as OMCs, legislations).

In particular, the main expected results are:

- sharing ESF evaluation practices throughout the Union;
- improving evaluation methods and questions;
- getting quality evaluation evidence at EU level;
- facilitating the use of evaluation results in policy design and implementation.

Deliverables may take the form of reports, synthesis notes, methodological guidelines, briefings, etc.

Meetings take place three to four times a year and bring together representatives of the Member States and the Commission. They are based on an agenda and conclusions are formalised in minutes.

Working groups may be set up. They are aimed at helping the ESF Evaluation Partnership to reach its objectives by contributing on specific well-identified issues.

## **2. Policy Themes**

The scope of the proposed themes corresponds to the actions that could be seen coming under the ESF priorities as described in EC Regulation n° 1081/2006 (art 3, 6, 7, 8). The issues to be dealt with are described in the evaluation plan the Commission services have circulated during a previous partnership meeting and which will be updated at regular intervals following contributions from the Members of the Partnership.