Brussels, 19/11/2019

Meeting of REGIO Evaluation Network

Brussels 11/10/2019

Minutes

1. Approval of the agenda

The Deputy Head of Evaluation and European Semester Unit opened the meeting of EVALNET and welcomed the participants. She introduced the programme of the day, the agenda was approved, and she introduced the new colleagues of the unit and their responsibilities.

2. Nature of the meeting

The one-day meeting addressed two main issues: monitoring, quality of data and indicators during the morning session, and evaluation and related issues during the afternoon session.

3. Quality of AIR data

Unit B2 presented the updated situation of the values reported by MS in the AIRs. The unit ran an exercise to carry out a plausibility assessment of the values reported at the national and EU level. The assessment showed the need to devote attention to the values which seem not plausible, in particular with regards to the 2023 targets.

The values taken into account are the ones reported in the AIRs submited in July 2019 - some of them changed already. The unit observed that the programmes values increased, with the selected values getting closer to the targets. The focus is on detecting possible errors in the values reported. Particularly, the attention is dedicated to the common indicators, because they are the ones used for the strategic report, and they are also reported online on the Open Data Platform. The unit is looking at the relationship between the selected and implemented values: it is just an arithmetic and preliminary check, and some of the errors could be related to encoding problems.

Some cases (20%) showed that, after 3 years of implementation, the values of common indicators indicate no selection rates. In other cases, were positive, selection values are larger than the 2023 targets. The point to clarify is whether this is due to the accuracy of the selected values reported or to the reliability of the target setting exercise.

The unit underlined that many of these issues are observed for the common indicators for enterprise, energy savings, and GHG emissions. Generally speaking, these errors could be clerical ones, linked to the encoding exercise.

The next task for the unit is to clean up the observed errors by the end of October in preparation for the strategic report. In this exercise, special attention should be given to the indicators linked to the performance framework; in this sense, the MAs should also correct the values reported for programme specific indicators, when needed.

Furthermore, the unit considers that the mid-term review represents also a good opportunity and to analyse the reliability of the 2023 targets.

Questions & Answers

a) MS: The amount to be reallocated are sometimes modest. The MS has carried out mid-term evaluations on regional operational programmes. In the reallocation of money, is the MS obliged to increase the performing indicator final targets for those priorities?
b) MS: the national authorities were trying to update and correct the values. In some cases, there has been an "overbooking" phenomenon related to some investment priorities; therefore, the values are indeed correct.
c) MS: the national authorities are reviewing the indicators' targets. Should they also look at the result indicators? Those results indicators values are influenced by other external factors and it is sometimes difficult to foresee possible scenarios.
d) MS: in the CPR, there are two possible procedures to amend the OP. As we understand, the EC is encouraging MS to revise all target values, not only the ones related to the performance framework. We would like to ask for the clarifications about the modalities through which MS can ask for the short procedure.
e) MS: when the responsible authorities selected an operation, they inserted the forecast for each year, therefore those values are the ones expected for that year. Therefore, the values are not cumulative.
f) MS: the national authorities are running cross checking controls in the monitoring systems at country and regional levels, but those systems do not have necessarily the same data. For selected values, for example, they cannot guarantee that the values reported in the national system correspond to the ones reported by regional authorities directly to the Commission. Therefore, is it possible to share the Commission database to cross check the data with the national data? It would be very useful for the authorities in the reprogramming period.
g) MS: they have decided to follow the short procedures. They check the values related to the performance framework. However, some MAs realised that some values reported in AIRs are wrong. Is it possible to change them or not?

Unit B2 replies:

a) and b) Unit B2 clarified that values that do not seem plausible could due to various factors. Those values need to be rectified and the reprogramming exercise is a way to correct them. There could be reasons that explain those values, if there are reasonable justifications, they will be accepted.
c) This exercise does not concern the result indicators; however, if the MS have good reasons to change the results indicators because they are no longer available to the programmes, i.e. by trying to find another proxy for the results, or they want to resettle the targets for the result indicators due to changes in assumptions, measurement methods etc, they are welcome to do so. If MS have the resources to look at the result indicators, it is a good exercise, which will help the national authorities and evaluators in future evaluations.
d) As regards the procedure, where the programme modification concerns only the reallocation of the performance reserve and the associated adjustments in indicators, the deadline for submission of the request to the EC is 2 months from the date of performance review decision. If the programme modification includes additional

changes, then the proposal for modification should be submitted to the Commission no later than 3 months from the performance review decision.

e) The unit clarified that all the values in the annual report should be cumulative.
f) Unit B2 replied that it is possible to share the data, if all the MS agree.
g) Unit B2 replied that the reallocation of the reserve will follow the short procedure. These targets need to be changed as soon as possible. In the discussion with the GUs, the unit B2 encourages them to engage discussions with the MAs in order to adjust and correct the targets. These amendments will fall under the 3 months procedures.

4. Result of the performance review

The performance review has been a top priority in the agenda in the first part of the year. Two EC Decisions, results of the Performance Review exercise, are in the pipeline to be adopted. Up to now, 57 EC decisions, which covered 298 programmes, have been adopted. The unit B2 thanked the MS for the cooperation. All the EC PF Decisions have been notified to the national Permanent Representations and there are all in the SFC. The modifications can be carried out in three months from the day the PERM-REP received the EC PF Decisions. The EC issued pre-suspension letters for four programmes, since they data received were not reliable enough to conduct the performance review. This means that the EC suspends the payments. The review will be carried out since the data the MS will send us are more reliable.

Unit B2 presented more detailed results of the PF exercise: €27.8 billion equals to the total amount of the performance reserve, out of which €21.9 are linked to performing axes. €5 billion which have be to reallocated from not performing to performing. Cohesion Funds performs better than the other funds, in terms of amount to be reallocated. The results by MS are not comparable, as the milestones set are different, as well as the level of ambition. Four MS are the ones where more than half of funds should be reallocated (in absolute terms). In relative terms, five MS are the ones where more than one third of the overall reserve has to be reprogrammed.

By thematic objectives, the highest amounts to reallocate in absolute terms are in TO4 (€927 million), TO1 (€677 million), TO09 (€522 million), TO6 (€444 million) and multi-TO (€1 billion). In relative terms, the highest amounts to reallocate are in TO4 (38%), TO11 (32%) and TO05 (29%).

The Unit B2 presented a further analysis by MS and thematic objectives: the Unit stressed that the presentation did not intend to compare MS.

The performance review exercise showed also the challenges of setting targets and milestones ahead of time. It is also useful as regards the future programming period, which will build on the experience accumulated in this process for the current programmes. The main difference between the periods is that, while the current exercise proved rather technical in that the allocation of the reserve is linked directly to the fulfilment of the 2018 milestones (and the 2023 targets in the future), for the next programming period the Commission proposes a more policy oriented and flexible approach whereas the reallocation of funds will be informed not only by indicators, but also by factors such as Country Specific Recommendations and significant socio-economic changes in the Member States in the context of the mid-term review.

Questions & Answers

MS: in case a priority, for various external reasons, has not met its milestone, but, in the meantime, it has recovered and has the potential to continue, is there a possibility to continue supporting it?

a) MS: the authorities could face the following situation: the MS received a positive performance review decision, but the MAs would like to reallocate the reserve. What should the authorities do in this situation? Should they use the two or three months' procedures? Second, some of the MAs would like to reallocate the reserve, but they do not want to change any targets for the indicators. What should be the approach?

b) Comment MS: For national programmes, the national authorities have to consider different categories of regions. In the reprogramming exercise, they aim to move resources from a priority to another, trying to keep them in the same programme when possible. In this regard, the thematic concentration is important to consider. When the resources have to be reallocated from one programme to another, this requires coordination at national level. Second, in addition to the suggestion not to compare countries on the basis of the results of the performance review, we suggest also not to compare programmes within countries since the same logic applies.

c) MS: What if a program has no performance framework, as it is in the case of Technical Assistance? Could the authorities reallocate the reserve to this programme?

d) MS: what will happen at the end of the programming period with the non-performing priorities? Should MS expect financial corrections? As to the thematic concentration and performance reserve, the authorities have a problem with TO4 in some OPs. What could be the consequences?

e) MS: in November, there will be a technical meeting, at the OP level, where one of the topics is about corrective measures – corrective measures following the serious failures. What should MS expect? Have you had some discussion with the GUs about it?

a) Unit B2 underlined again the limits of the performance of the exercise. The performance review is a specific exercise that assess the situation up to 2018. The Regulation points out that the reserve should be reallocated from non-performing axis to performing ones. Therefore this reprogramming exercise should focus on implementing the decision on the performance review.

   EGESIF (Expert group on European Structural and Investment Funds) held a session about the financial management. The current performance review exercise refers to the re-allocation of the 6% reserve. Nevertheless, if in the future, the MA concludes that more resources are needed for a priority axis, then the MS should propose a modification, even if this action could clash with the performance review exercise. If MS have solid and robust justifications to do so, they can present it to unit B2, and it will be analysed case-by-case. Finally, the unit suggested the MS that in case they need to move resources, they can use the main allocation instead of the reserve as done up to 2019.

As to the question about changing or not the targets for the PR indicators in the axis which receives the funds, the MS should explain to the EC why and how the additional funds could affect the indicators.

c) Unit B2 clarified that the Technical Assistant must be left out from this exercise.

d) The Unit B2 replied that, at the end of the programming period, potential financial corrections could occur if there will be severe under achievements of targets. The conditions in which this could happen are set out in the Regulation. The MS could send specific questions to DG REGIO on the issue for further clarifications.

As to the question about the TO4, this issue was raised already during 2018. As regards the targets, it is the MS role to decide on what is achievable until 2023, also given the 80% rate of project selection already reached. In the context of the performance review exercise we see an opportunity to re-analyse the validity of the assumptions underlying the 2023 targets in the programmes, but the MS should be aware that as we come closer to the end of the period, the Commission will apply a similar strict approach as regards further modifications in targets if that is likely to amount to adjustments of performance measures to the implementation on the ground.

e) Unit B2 suggested that national authorities discuss the issue of corrective measures with the geographical units. In principle, the corrective measures are the ones that MS should have taken to avoid serious failures.

5. Post-2020 programming period

The meeting continued with the presentation of the revised annex 1 for common indicators for ERDF and Cohesion Fund for post 2020. The revised annex endorsed by the Council and the associated revised indicator fiches were shared with the members of the Evaluation Network via CIRCABC, and the MS were invited to review the revisions in the indicator fiches and send comments no later than December 23. At this stage, the comments expected should concentrate on the content on the fiches, and not on the list of indicators which is the outcome of the negotiations in the Council.

The unit presented the indicators list that the Council endorsed. The changes made were minimal: some related to the names, but they were not really substantial in terms of indicators scoping. The discussion leading to this list of indicators is documented via the minutes available in the INFOREGIO website. The main changes made relate to the name of the indicators, included in the legislative basis, and to the metadata, which are critical to define the scope and the measurement unit of the indicators.

Overall, two new indicators were proposed in this process: the first one was already proposed by EVALNET, but not integrated in the list because of a clerical error – “open spaces created or rehabilitated”, and a new one for the INTERREG list – “projects supporting cooperation across cross border to develop urban-rural linkages”.

In total, there are 90 output indicators and 64 result indicators. To optimize the workload for the EC and the MS, the unit B2 revised only the fiches of indicators agreed in the Council in May. The next stage is the negotiation with the European Parliament, a forum where new indicators could be added.

The fiches of the indicators provided refer to Policy Objective 1-5, the INTERREG fiches are still in progress and then the unit will circulate them. The unit B2 streamlined the structure of the fiches in terms of measurement units, the need for baselines and milestones by type of indicators, the possibility to use the indicators with the stars in all the Policy Objectives. Moreover, clarifications are included as regards the aggregation rule such that for any of these indicators, it should be possible to aggregate the data from a project level and further up. Other aspects included in the fiches: sources of data collection, time of measurement, rules for removing double counting, and reporting issues.

The unit reiterated that the indicators fiches are online in CIRCABC and the MS representatives can send the comments by the 23rd of December. In addition, the unit invited the MS to send also representative examples of projects/ operations that could be useful for informing the examples to be included in the indicator fiches.

The unit is planning to organise two workshops: i) the first one on the methodologies to use for transport result indicators (possibly by mid-December, subject to availability of a suitable location); and ii) on the methodologies for result indicator for GHG emissions. MS experts will be invited to present and share their expertise. For the workshop on transport indicators, we will invite you to identify experts on transport from your country who could participate to the event. We will send you an email with the necessary details as we make progress with the organisation.

As regards the indicator for GHG emissions, we learn that colleagues in the Commission are in the process of developing a common guidance for calculating GHG emissions that will be applied by all Commission services. Therefore, we propose to organise the workshop together on this topic once this guidance in finalised, possibly by February next year.

As regards the next meeting, we would like to meet and discuss together the outcome of the trialogue negotiations as regards the indicator system. At this stage we cannot provide a firm timeline since this is dependent on the overall process for the MFF negotiations. Our hope is that we could meet again in March next year, but a concrete date will be chosen once we learn more about the progress in the MFF negotiations.

Questions & Answers

a) Comment MS: The members in the Evaluation Network could play a role to help the negotiations with the European Parliament. Given the challenges of developing new indicators, the technical expertise required, and the efforts already invested for developing the current list, we could help preserve this outcome and inform the negotiation process in the trialogue also to ensure that the number of the indicators in the list remains manageable. Second, we would propose to ask the MAs to present indicators fiches with metadata even for programme specific indicators when they are introduced in the programmes in order to ensure that these indicators are measurable.

b) MS: the fiches are very useful also in the implementation process in order to ensure coherence of the indicator system. Second, it would also be useful to introduce the logic of intervention in a chart form in order to clarify the positioning of the indicators at intervention level. Third, MS would like to have more clarification on the relationship between result and output indicators (whether common or programme specific). For example, should each output indicator have a corresponding result indicator?

c) MS: As regards the use of the SFC system in the future (period post 2020), could you clarify how will the list of indicators in Annex I to the ERDF/CF Regulation be behaving in SFC? The Annex I says that all of RCOs and RCRs are *'not limited to a policy objective'* and their division within specific objectives is only *'for the presentational reasons'*. How will it work technically in SFC then? Can we expect that there will not be anymore the situation that there is a menu of indicators available only for the dedicated specific objective? Will all of the indicators be available for all specific objectives within all policy objectives? Are then chosen indicators marked with '*' in order to point that they <u>are expected</u> to be used in various specific objectives?

a) Unit B2 welcomed the proposal of the MS for the members of the Evaluation Network to support the negotiation process, emphasizing also that it would be very useful to help explain the nature and logic of the indicator system proposed in order to make sure that any new amendments are compatible and coherent with this framework. As regards the fiches for the programme specific indicators, there are some Member States already using such fiches for all indicators proposed in their programmes. The unit would encourage the use of fiches with metadata for all indicators used in the programmes since this is a good practice for anybody who works with indicators.

b) Indeed, provided we could introduce a guidance for the indicator system in the future, this would clearly need to include first the intervention logic and the presentation of the indicator system in this context. Alternatively, we can discuss the intervention logic in our meetings of the Evaluation Network and then help spread the knowledged across MAs.

   As to the link between output and result indicators, this is more of an issue of intervention logic. We do not aim at establishing automatic rules for the use of indicators, but rather promote an approach oriented by the intervention logic of the intervention: given the objective of an intervention, the MA should establish how the success of the investment would look like and choose the appropriate result indicator representing this objective; subsequently, the choice of the output indicator(s) should aim at measuring the use of the resources.

c) As to the SFC procedure, the Unit B2 will go back to the colleagues in house to ask and clarify.

6. Helpdesk activities

The Deputy Head of Unit introduced the second part of the meeting and presented the agenda.

Unit B2 and Mr. Ward, Director of Applica, presented the Helpdesk support activities.

Unit B2 presented the purpose of the support - to improve the quality of MS evaluations, to provide tools and expertise to advance the products, as well as to summarise the findings and illustrate and show them at the MS and EU level. The support is available for all the MS and it consists in three main activities: i) review of evaluation activities; ii) support to MAs in evaluation activities; iii) training.

The Unit collected already about 700 evaluations reviewed and their summaries are available in INFOREGIO library. It received some inputs relating to the level of readability of them, thus we are planning to publish the list and the summaries of the evaluations in the OPENDATA Platform.

Other services are related to the willingness to capitalise the expertise and knowledge generated: the unit plans to prepare Country Reports, which will show what are the main conclusion of evaluations in the MS, and which will allow to draw some conclusions on the quality of evaluations carried out. Moreover, thematic reports, collecting information per TO, will be prepared. The reports will be available for MS and for the contractors that will carry out the *ex post* evaluations. Finally, the unit plans to produce summaries: the aim is to identify good practices for evaluation methods and approaches.

The second activity relates to peer reviewing, which becomes more a methodological support. After the launch of the call for expression of interest, the unit received 53 requests for methodological support. The content of each request will be discussed bilaterally between the helpdesk and the MS. Finally, Unit B2 announced the plan to launch a call for expression of interest and it would like to have feedback from MS on the type of support that is needed in order to adopt a more strategic approach for the next 3 years. In this respect, it has prepared a survey for the MAs.

The last strand of activity is the summer school: the next summer school will be in Estonia, the unit will send a questionnaire to understand which are the main topics MS would like to address.

7. Feedback on peer-review service from the Helpdesk in Czechia

The meeting continued with the presentation and sharing of experience from the Czech representative about the peer review exercise carried out with the Helpdesk support. The Helpdesk provided peer-review support for two *ex post* evaluation – *Ex post* evaluation of R&D programmes 2007-2013; and *Ex post* evaluation of corporate research, development and innovation programmes 2007-2013. The Czech representative described how the exercise was run, emphasized challenges to evaluation (such as budgets, terms of reference, availability of expertise, data availability etc) and lessons learnt. In terms of avenues for further development, the presentation emphasized the need for early feedback, longer cooperation with the Helpdesk experts during the evaluation process, involvement of the expert evaluators (suppliers) in the assessment of the evaluation, the adaptation of the feedback provided to what is feasible and could be implemented in the current context of the country, and advice/ recommendations on what be done better from the perspective of the institutionalisation of evaluation and an evidence-based culture in the Member States.

Questions & Answers

a) MS question for the CZ representative: among the recommendations given by the Evaluation Helpdesk, how many of them were already known by the MAs? Do you think they can implemented?

CZ replied that the feedback on the methodological rigor was rather new, also in the view of the methodologies chosen for the evaluation. As regards other recommendations, many issues were signalled for the terms of reference; in this regard, these issues were know from the outset of the evaluation process, and there were reasons why they could not be resolved. For example, the issues related to availability of data – this is still work in progress, and it requires further effort at country level. From this perspective, the feedback is useful since it provides support to these further efforts to ensure access to the data necessary for evaluation in the future when engaging in the dialogue with relevant national actors. What is also useful is to engage also the expert evaluators in the dialogue.

b) MS question for evaluation helpdesk: can you assess that the recommendations issued are systematic across countries? Is it possible to prepare a kind of best practise guide to help and support the MS during the preparation and implementation phase of the evaluation?

Applica Director replies that they do not have the capacity to provide such a detailed analysis and guidance. The proposal is to capitalise the expertise and knowledge by issuing country reports and thematic reports. To some extent, summer schools have gone through various aspects of evaluation and presented good practices. It is not helpful and it can be dangerous to develop the best practice evaluation guide, because each evaluation is different and the risk is to have the same methodologies applied across all the evaluations, without taking into account that each of them is different. Each evaluation has its own features and a guide can work for an evaluation, but it cannot work for another. Finally, certain issues are very country specific and that is one of the reasons why the contractors and the unit have decided to not issue a guidance. Applica Director underlined that the service is always available to support MS and to provide follow up, through physical presence in the MS or via emails, phone calls, and so on.

c) MS question to Helpdesk: there are problems related to the data collection. How could we improve the evaluation methods if we do not have reliable data?

Applica Director and the unit explained that this is a problem also at the EU level and it is often a capacity problem.

Some MS indicated that data are collected, but, because of administrative restrictions, evaluators cannot use them. Analysts or evaluators from the government cannot go to the "safe rooms" to use the data.**Evaluation Helpdesk – report on evaluations from MS**

Applica presented the results of the evaluations plans reviewed and presented the possible upcoming trends in evaluation in the coming years - end of the programming periods. Up to end of August, Helpdesk identified 212 evaluations on ERDF and Cohesion Fund OPs for 2014-2020, plus eight on 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods. In addition, other 183 on ERDF and ESF OPs 2014-2020, and 10 on both programming periods. In total, 413 identified evaluations on ERDF-financed OPs covering 2014-2020. From evaluation plans reviewed by Helpdesk (75% of total), 2268 evaluations are planned on OPs. Planned schedules for undertaking evaluations indicate widespread delays as, by now, twice as many evaluations should have been carried out. Delays could be caused largely by late start of programmes. Therefore, one would expect either a big increase in evaluations from now to end of period, or substantial revision to evaluation plans.

Of the 2268 evaluations planned, 1475 evaluations (65% of the total) will be impact alone or combined with procedure and/or monitoring. Of the 413 evaluations identified, only 59 will be on impact. Of 248 evaluations published since January 2015, 199 are impact evaluations. If the evaluation plans are realised, around 1900 impact evaluations would be still to be carried out on 2014-2020 period.

Applica Director provided insights on the evaluations reviewed and explained how they score and assess the evaluations, which criteria they apply to examine them. He indicated the main issues observed and the main features present in the higher quality evaluations.

Questions & Answers

Unit B2 asked the MS representative what are the plans to carry out the evaluation of the programmes supported during this programming period.

MS: We can expect lot of impact evaluations in the future. 30% of the projects are completed. In the past programming period, most of evaluations were carried out in 2015, thus we expect the same will happen for this programing period. Currently, national authorities are preparing the evaluation plans: the main observation relates to the increasing number of process evaluations conducted so far, and the efforts made to be prepared to undertake mid term or *ex post* evaluations. In the current programing period, thanks to the *ex ante* evaluation, it will be easier to recreate the logic of intervention and to very and explain the results and effects obtained. In the future, the ability to recreate the logic of intervention will be more difficult, as the requirement to carry out the *ex ante* evaluations won't be compulsory, and the MAs already signalled that ex-ante evaluation is not a priority for them.

Unit B2: *Ex ante* evaluation criticism is frequent, but MS can, in any case, decide to carry out them, even without the EC obligation.

MS: In our case, we have decided to carry out the ex post evaluation for the current period at the same time with the ex-ante evaluation for the future period. In our view, these two tasks are related, and the combining them in the same exercise also has the advantage of reducing the administrative burden generated by public procurement procedures. In this way we are encouraging also the MAs to carry out the ex-ante evaluations for their priorities.

MS: We only postponed the first round of evaluations due to internal administrative procedures. We are using the existing data to see how the projects are performing and how likely they are to have an impact. One issue we would like to signal refers to the GDPR legislation and the role of the evaluators in this context as regards the processing of personal data. The evaluation units are likely to be considered as "conductors" (and maybe also "processors") in legislative terms, and therefore may have the obligation to provide guidance as regards data processing. Companies are reluctant to take such responsibilities, especially in view of the high penalties associated with non-compliance. Some guidance on how to approach this issue would be useful, especially as regards our role as evaluation units in this process. This is another reason why the process of evaluation is delayed due to the uncertainties involved.

Unit B2: The unit replied that it has not yet tackled the GDPR related problems, and it is going to clarify it in the house.

MS: Theory-based evaluations take lot of time; it is difficult to catch up with the evaluation plans. The difficulties identified refer to several factors: the evaluators in the market do not have much experience in carrying out evaluations with new methodologies. This may even induce delays in the evaluation process (for instance, an evaluation scheduled initially for one year may continue for two years instead). Moreover, the national and regional authorities ask for good practices and guidance in this process. Therefore, it is very important to promote the good practices in evaluation, especially for impact evaluation with theory-based methods.

MS: I would like to emphasize that the design of the programme is very important. If this is done based on an intervention logic and a theory of change, then this is an ex ante evaluation that facilitates significantly the evaluation effort later on. It is extremely difficult for an evaluator to "reconstruct" an intervention logic that may not be there; in this process, one needs to be careful not to reconstruct the programme in a perfect way, but as it was supposed to be. Therefore, designing the programme is the key: it takes a little longer, but it is very valuable.

Applica: we agree that the best time to plan an evaluation is when the programme is designed.

MS: I recall that one issue identified by the Helpdesk in our evaluation referred to the assessment of the contribution of other factors (other than our interventions) that can affect the outcomes. We find that this is difficult to assess, and therefore would appreciate if you had good examples that can illustrate this type of analysis.

8. Unpacking growth impacts of EU cohesion policy: transmission channels from cohesion policy to growth

The second part of the afternoon meeting was dedicated to the presentation from REGIO Unit B1 and further discussion of the article written by EC colleagues Peter Berkowitz, Philippe Monfort and Jerzy Pieńkowski – "Unpacking the growth impacts of European Union Cohesion Policy: transmission channels from Cohesion Policy into economic growth" published in Regional Study in April 2019 (available online).

B2 Unit: There seems to be a disconnect between the evaluation world and the work done for academic research. A possible idea could be to try to bridge this gap in order to use the methodological expertise from the academia on the evaluation methods (such as counterfactual method).

Applica: On the issue of the possibility to use the results from the evaluations produced by Member States to inform the evaluations at EU level, one difficulty will be to separate the evaluation results from the context in which they are framed. For example, if a given measure works in a particular country, that does not necessarily mean it will be automatically successful in another region because the success may be dependent on a series of factors (such as the way it is implemented), and some of them unobservable (such the characteristics of entities supported). Furthermore, in evaluation we tend to focus on the effects of a particular measure, and maybe less on impacts on the rest of the economy (other actors not supported, the net effects at regional level etc). Therefore, it is important to go beyond data crunching, as emphasized in the article presented, and focus on the analysis of the transmission mechanisms. One needs to know how a measure is expected to influence the outcomes and find evidence on the transmission mechanism. In this regard, the evaluation findings could inform and help calibrate the general equilibrium models that can then be used to simulate the impacts of the policy at the macroeconomic level.

MS: Given the diversity of the interventions we support, there is also the complexity of the attribution of effects and the identification of spillover effects in the context of gathering the evidence for the links embedded in the transmission mechanisms.

MS: We are using macroeconomic models in our evaluations, but this needs to be complemented also by qualitative analysis gathered from the field, especially as regards the distributional effects of a policy measure in order to identify the extent to which the policy results bring the expected benefits for all the groups affected.

Unit B1: I agree with a view that several methods should be used in the context of the assessment of the policy. Each instrument is adapted for analysing a part of the story, and this is why in our article we warn against relying on a simplified and partial analysis that does not have the potential to reflect the trade-offs involved by implementing the policy.

9. Conclusion and next meeting

For the AOB point of the meeting, the Deputy Head of Evaluation and European Semester Unit listed the ongoing evaluation efforts in the Commission (major projects for transport and environment, evaluation of Jaspers, and an evaluation of R&D intervention). The Commission is also preparing to launch an evaluation of e-Cohesion systems and the Member States are invited to send any evaluation or study on e-Cohesion system in their country, to the extent available.

MS: In terms of events, Poland is organising three events Prague (next two weeks), Budapest and Cracow (December 9-10).

As regards the next meeting, the provisional date is Mach 2020, but the Member States will be informed on the details later on, depending on the progress in the MFF negotiations. Then she closed the meeting and thanked the MS representative for the participation and collaboration.

10. List of participants

The meeting was attended by 37 governmental experts representing 24 Member States.