

Minutes of the expert group Evaluation Network Meeting with Member States

Brussels, 30/06/2020

Minutes

Evaluation Network Meeting with Member States (EVALNET)
13 May 2020, online meeting

1. Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of previous meeting

2. Nature of the meeting

The Head of Evaluation and European Semester Unit (REGIO B.2), Ms Mariana Hristcheva, opened the meeting of EVALNET and welcomed participants (including newcomers). Due to the current travel restrictions, the meeting was organised online via Webex for the first time. The meeting was organised exclusively for the members of the EVALNET network. However, due to its online nature, and thus without the constraints of a maximum number of participants in a physical environment, it was possible that more representatives from each Member State would join the meeting.

Ms. Hristcheva presented the timeline of the most recent actions taken since the last meeting of the EVALNET, which took place in October 2019.

The meeting was organised in view of addressing two main topics of discussion:

- a) The monitoring of the COVID-19 response in Member States (MS) through the Operational Programmes (OP);
- b) The preparation of the future 2021-2027 programmes, in terms of programming the policy objective, specific objective, common indicators and categories of intervention.

3. The monitoring of the COVID-19 response in MS through the OPs

Mr John Walsh (REGIO B.2) presented the Commission “Non-paper”, a joint document prepared by DG REGIO and DG EMPL, endorsed by DG SANTE and communicated to EGESIF on 13 May 2020. It presents a list of programme specific indicators related to the cohesion policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The document was presented to encourage MS with a common approach regarding the programme specific indicators that could be used to monitor the response and outputs related to newly introduced measures for tackling the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr Walsh pointed out that by using the existing ERDF intervention field codes (053+081) and common output indicator (CO36), specific information on the COVID-19 response will be difficult to differentiate from the already existing health related actions. There is a high policy and political interest to communicate on the specific outputs of the COVID-19 response at regional, national, and EU levels. The Commission chose to issue a non-paper on this topic in order to be able to provide its inputs swiftly to the MS (a legislative amendment would have taken more time). The Commission relies on the fruitful close cooperation with MS in order to implement this voluntary initiative in a coordinated manner across the relevant programmes.

Mr Walsh highlighted that a crucial aspect related to the coordinated use of the programme specific indicators proposed by the non-paper is only using the “CV” codes proposed for the named indicators and not using them for other programme specific indicators. This will allow

the systematic aggregation at EU level of the values reported by each OP making use of the respective indicators.

As a first step, it was proposed that the MAs encode the proposed COVID-19 related output indicators in their monitoring systems. The second step would be attaching the relevant indicators to projects. Third, the relevant programme specific indicators are added in programme modifications (ideally by the end of 2020, such that the OPs will be able to report on these outputs in AIR 2020), depending on the specific actions planned to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Walsh mentioned that there are ongoing discussion to add the list of proposed COVID-19 programme specific indicators in SFC (with the titles translated in the national languages) in order to streamline their inclusion in the OPs. (Until then the programmes may add the indicators manually in SFC2014)

The list of proposed COVID-19 programme specific indicators are grouped as follows: :

- ERDF related indicators
 - o (CV1-CV5) concerns the values of investments in the health sector (all in total public cost)
 - o (CV6-CV11) concerns the physical investments in the health sector
 - o (CV20-CV25) concerns the support provided to enterprises
- ESF related indicators
 - o (CV30-CV33) concerns output indicators related to ESF investments
 - o (CVR1, CVR2) concerns result indicators related to ESF investments

The PowerPoint presentation used during this meeting and the *Commission “Non-paper” on programme specific indicators that might be used to monitor the response and outputs related to newly introduced measures for tackling the COVID-19 crisis* are uploaded and made available to all members of the EVALNET on CIRCABC.

➔ Questions and answers

Ms Hristcheva invited the participants to the meeting to ask any questions that they might have in the chat box or to indicate if they would like to take the floor.

There were several questions received from the participants:

Q1 (AT, MT): The implementation of new indicators in the electronic monitoring system at this stage of the programming period might be technically challenging. If the indicators are not included in a modification to the OP, in what format (other than the AIR through the SFC) can any progress be reported to the EC? Would manual monitoring (in Excel) be a possible alternative?

Reply: The Commission is aware of the possible administrative burden that might be entailed on the MAs by the introduction of these new indicators. But in the long term this will be compensated by the streamlined reporting that will be made within each OP. It will be difficult to follow and aggregate at EU level if reporting is done outside the framework of the AIRs. Also, it should be taken into consideration that, if the data on the COVID-19 programme specific indicators proposed through the non-paper, is made public on the Open Data Platform, we should avoid having discrepancies between the communication of these outputs to the general public (since the ODP is fed directly by the information in the AIRs, to avoid as far as possible manual input of the data).

Q2 (PL): Will the EC provide some definitions of those proposed programme specific indicators?

Reply: Definitions will not be provided by the EC for these COVID-19 programme specific indicators – each MS would need to decide on definitions at national level (in some cases mapping existing national indicators to the COVID-19 specific list. A swift response on making use of these indicators is of the essence in order to ensure that meaningful information is captured and later on reported.

Q3 (PL): If MS have already introduced some indicators on the national level (very similar to the one proposed now through the non-paper) should we once again introduce EC indicators and match them together?

Reply: In this case:

- if the scope of the already introduced indicator matches with one indicator of the non-paper, it would be appreciated if the title and code of the national indicator is changed so as to match the EC's proposal;
- if the already introduced indicator encompasses more than one indicator of the non-paper, it would be appreciated if the relevant indicators proposed by the EC are introduced in the OP.

Q4 (PL): CV4 ('Value of IT equipment and software/licences financed in COVID-19 response') can be disaggregated only for these 3 sub-indicators (CV4a, CV4b, CV4c), or the disaggregation might be wider, also for different groups than SMEs, health and education?

Reply: The disaggregation may be extended also for different groups, but the codes used should be different than those proposed already in the non-paper. Programmes may also create other "CVxx" indicators provided they do not use the codes listed.

Q5 (BG): The amendments to some of the programmes have already been approved by the respective Monitoring Committees and the Council of Ministers (and are validated in SFC2014). These amendments include programme specific indicators and common output indicators (as listed in the Regulation). How should we proceed in order not to cause any delays in the adoption of programme amendments and in the implementation of the COVID-response measures?

Reply: In case the OP amendment is already at an advanced stage, the EC would recommend to consider the introduction of the relevant COVID-19 indicators from the non-paper with the next OP amendment (ideally by the end of 2020, such that the OPs will be able to report on these outputs in AIR 2020).

Q6 (GR): In case an OP has planned to use a specific indicator that is not covering all relevant actions, could we use indicators from the list you suggested along with our own specific indicators?

Reply: Yes, the list included in the non-paper is non-exhaustive, it includes only a proposal of programme specific indicators that the EC considered of interest on a horizontal level across the EU / MSs. The chosen programme specific indicators by each OP should reflect the expected output of the actions.

Q7 (CY): Considering that the main aim of all MS is to take measures and prevent the expansion of the COVID-19, could the EC also propose specific objectives and result indicators as well?

Reply: The non-paper does not contain proposals for specific objectives and ERDF programme specific result indicators (impacts). There is a proposal for ESF programme specific result indicators included in the non-paper.

On the topic of ESF COVID-19 programme specific result indicators, Mr Gabor Toth (DG EMPL) clarified that, in line with existing ESF practice, the EC will accept setting the target value at a later stage (i.e. leave blank the field with the value of the target, in case the quantification is not possible at this stage).

Q8 (GR): Can we use the coding CV for other indicators not included in the ECs list in case we are financing COVID-19 related actions? For example CVGR100?

Reply: Yes, but it is important to mention that, from a technical point of view, SFC allows for indicator codes of maximum 5 characters.

Q9: The ES delegation made an oral intervention on the topic of the COVID-19 programme specific indicators. The MS representative mentioned that they would appreciate a shorter list of proposed programme specific indicators related to COVID-19 response, considering that the OPs are already reporting on 40 common and 20 programme specific output indicators. At this moment, it is rather difficult for the MAs to select the relevant programme specific indicators from the non-paper since it is not yet clear which are the specific actions that will be funded by the OPs to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Their idea was to create a single specific indicator at national level that would be used to capture in a comprehensive manner the outputs from the COVID-19 response. The MS representative also pointed out that the list in the non-paper does not making reference to expenditure in relation to the new jobs created on a short term for tackling the health crisis (i.e. security guards, medical staff, etc.).

Reply: The EC took note of this intervention and of the very difficult situation on the ground in Spain and other Member States. Mr John Walsh mentioned that the amendment of the OPs for including the COVID-19 related indicators can be made also at a later stage (ideally before the end of 2020), once the list of actions to be funded is clear to the MA. On the list of programme specific indicators included in the non-paper, it will be difficult at this point to integrate the new proposal. However, as mentioned before, the MAs can decide on other programme specific indicators, not included in the non-paper and not identified with codes already assigned in the non-paper.

4. Programming of 2021-2027 programmes

Ms Hristcheva presented the active work streams within the REGIO B.2 unit, with respect to the future programming period:

- there have been several contributions received from MS on the draft indicator fiches; the final version of the common output and result indicators fiches will be available once the Trilogue negotiations are finalised.
- the work with JASPERS on the indicators on transport is under finalisation, following also the inputs collected during the seminar with MS held in February 2020
- a (online) seminar with MS will be planned regarding the measurement of GHG emissions and savings.

In order to support MS in preparing the future programmes (especially on the part related to indicators and associated methodology for setting the targets), B.2 unit has developed a stylised example of a programme and methodological document of the performance framework. Mr Máté Tas (REGIO B.2) presented the example of SO1.1 research and Innovation (in SMEs) .

The example of the programme content and associated methodological document can be consulted in detail in the PowerPoint presentation of the meeting, which is available on CIRCABC for all the members of the EVALNET.

The programme presented as example is targeting innovation in SMEs and has one Priority -> one Policy Objective (PO 1) -> one Specific Objective (SO 1.1) -> two actions. The indicators included in the programme are both common and specific ones.

Mr Tas highlighted the fact that in Tables 4, 5, 6 of the programme template on the dimensions of the funds, the amounts that should be included concern only the EU share (not the total public cost).

Mr Tas explained that the methodological document is of utmost importance for understanding some of the elements included in the programme. This is because, when it comes to indicators and categorisation, the programme template is mainly based on tables containing numerical information, while there is no section where the MA would be able to explain the assumptions used behind the set targets or the links between the categorisation, outputs and results. Also, the methodological document for the performance framework will be useful in preserving the institutional memory within the MAs over the course of the programme implementation and will represent a clear basis that will inform the possible target adjustments in future programme amendments.

The stylised example of the methodological document is structured by action and presents the assumptions considered for setting the targets and milestones (in the case of output indicators) of the performance framework. There is a clear link between the specific objective and the selected output and result indicators. Finally, the example of the methodological document shows the correlations between the actions, indicators with milestones and targets, financial allocation and intervention field. Differently from the content of the programme document, the amount associated with intervention fields is presented as total costs (EU + national contribution) in the methodological document.

➔ Questions and answers

Q10 (PL): Based on the EC's presentation, the targeting setting should be mostly based on assumptions. In your opinion what should be the source of these assumptions?

Reply: The source of the assumptions could be different at each MS level. In general, the past programming experience or a benchmark analysis could provide meaningful information for the target setting. IT correctly mentioned also the 2014-2020 evaluations and studies as a relevant source of information for the assumptions.

Q11 (PL, GR): The targets should be set at 2029 but taking into account allocation for period 2021-2025 or should the total allocation for 2029 be considered when setting targets?

Reply: The targets should be set for 2029 according to the Council compromise text. The financial allocation to be considered will be established in the final form of the legislation. Following the negotiations with the Council, the updated (but not yet final) legislative proposal suggests to consider $5 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}$ years of the financing plan.

Q12 (LV): Does the EC expect that there is as well a justification / reasoning behind assumptions (both for output and result indicators) included in the methodology document?

Reply: It should be sufficient to clearly indicate the source of the information on which the assumptions are based included in the methodological document and to explain their role in the calculation.

[Additional comment: adjustments may be necessary to the (historical) reference values taken from the above-mentioned information sources in case the circumstances that drove those reference values are expected to change significantly in the future.]

Q13 (AT): Is it possible to prepare the methodology document according to Art. 13 CPR on the level of the specific objectives instead of actions? On the level of measures/actions the information can be highly repetitive as many indicators are used several times within the programme, also, the programme uses the level of the specific objective for the reporting of indicators, therefore we would prefer the level of the specific objective.

Reply: The stylised example that was presented should not be regarded as guidance or a template. However, we consider that it presents the detail required to understand how the programme was built and the underlying intervention rationale.

[Additional comment: In a specific objective with several actions and/or multiple categories of region it is unlikely that a methodology at SO level will offer sufficient insight required under CPR Article 13. Nevertheless, other methodologies, based on target groups instead of types of actions are possible, for instance in ESF.]

Q14 (GR): Does the EC plan to prepare a methodological document dealing with the assumptions on target setting and choosing the appropriate indicators?

Reply: The EC will not provide any guidelines or templates for drafting the methodological document. The presentation to the seminars with Member States and to Evalnet (including stylised examples) are available, while the finalised indicator fiches for the common output and result indicators will be shared with MS once the legislation is finalised.

Q15 (HR): Will the specific indicators first need to be negotiated in the PF methodology document so that they could be used in OP negotiations? Which document is the origin to negotiate specific indicators, is it OP or PF methodology document? When is the first and the latest date to hand over the PF methodology document for negotiations?

Reply: The EC will not be able to provide an assessment of the proposed indicators and associated targets without having the methodological document to explain the links and assumptions. The EC expects during the informal negotiations on the programme, that the quantified methodological document will be available to be shared with the EC, including the definitions of the specific indicators.

Q16 (HR): Is there an obligation to respect the matching between output indicators and result indicators proposed in the fiches for each common indicator? In addition, can a programme specific indicator be matched with a common indicator?

Reply: The common indicators fiche highlight the links between the common output and result indicators, as they were envisaged upon drafting the list of indicators for the future programming period. It is possible to match programme specific indicators with common indicators, in case no match can be found between the available and relevant common indicators.

Q17 (HR): In case of financing not linked to cost could the EC give an example of results achieved and conditions fulfilled for: (1) technical assistance or (2) for regular activities within specific objectives.

Reply: Reference was made to the examples presented at the March 2020 seminar with Member States.

Q18 (HR): A question that is not related to performance framework: actions safeguarding equality etc need to be included in every specific objective or only when it is applicable?

Reply: Narrative issues related to the programme template such as this were addressed in the March Seminar with member states. Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination need to be set out for all those specific objectives where they are applicable.

Q19 (HR): In context of performance framework and technical assistance could the EC give some example regarding the fact that for the flat rate TA no indicators are set?

Reply: The Commission proposed common indicators for TA were not retained during negotiations. Programmes will be asked to set specific indicators only for the TA specific priorities. On the other hand, flat-rate TA will not need to be accompanied by specific indicators

Q20 (FI): Can one project be divided between several intervention fields?

R: The division of the expenditure at project level between intervention fields is to be planned and managed by each MA, according to the intervention logic of the programme and the specific calls for proposals planned.

Q21 (LU): Could the EC confirm that the AIR2019 will be uploaded in the “light” version (i.e. not extended) in SFC2014?

R: Yes, it was confirmed.

Mr Tas presented next a tool developed by REGIO B.2 for the simplification of the programming process. It is a list of correlation tables between Policy Objectives, Specific Objectives, common indicators and categorisation dimensions. The tool is a work in progress, since the legislation is not yet approved – updates will be made based on the final format of the relevant legislation. The information included in the tables will be transposed also in SFC2021 through dropdown menus.

This tool is available on CIRCABC for all the members of the EVALNET.

5. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

Ms Hristcheva concluded the meeting by asking the participants their views on possible topics to be discussed during the future EVALNET meetings, such as:

- More examples of Specific Objectives for the 2021-2027 programming period
- Evaluation Help desk activities (i.e. summer school) / lessons learned
- Discussion of requirements on MS impact evaluation: exchange experience on challenges conducting impact evaluations of specific objectives
- New datasets on Open Data / next generation ODP
- AIR 2019 preparations; SFC2014 data synchronisation
- Other relevant issues

The Head of Evaluation and European Semester Unit, Ms Hristcheva, closed the meeting, thanked the participants and expressed gratitude for their contribution to the topics discussed.

6. Next steps

The participants were asked to send their views on the proposals from above or any other comment on the topics discussed during the meeting by email, to the functional mailbox of EVALNET (regio-eval@ec.europa.eu), by 22 May 2020.

7. Next meeting

Ms Hristcheva mentioned that, given the fact that the meetings should take place online for the time being, if requested by the EVALNET members, the EC would be able to organise a new online meeting relatively soon for discussing the topics of interest that will be highlighted by the participants via email.

8. List of participants

The meeting was attended by 82 governmental experts representing 24 Member States. On the EC side, representatives from DG REGIO, DG EMPL and DG BUDG attended the meeting.