

## **Minutes of the expert groups**

Brussels, February 15, 2022

### **Minutes**

Meeting of the Evaluation Network- DG REGIO

13-14/12/2021, WebEx meeting

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

#### **2. Nature of the meeting**

Non-public virtual meeting organised for the members of the REGIO Evaluation Network expert group.

#### **3. List of points discussed**

##### **1- Opening remarks by Peter Berkowitz, Director of Directorate B - Policy, DG REGIO**

Director Peter Berkowitz has emphasised that evaluation is central to our policy and important part of the regulation. The Evaluation Network is the interface between the EC and the Member States where we can exchange and improve our practices. This is also a significant commitment of the Commission, to gain knowledge and learn lessons to develop better programmes. The Director thanked the continuous support from the network and recognised the concrete collective achievement such as the SWD on 2021-2027 performance evaluation and monitoring with the annex on the common indicators. Important steps forward were made in the new regulation to improve the quality and consistency of the evaluation framework. This would not have been possible without the discussions held with the network. Another aspect of network's has been to improve the quality of the evaluations through the sharing of experiences and knowledge. Finally, the network has played an important role, and hopefully will continue to do so, in methodological developments, and to address specific challenges such as the use of data and big data. To conclude, Director Peter Berkowitz thanked all the members of the network for their commitment and collaboration.

##### **2- Preparation and negotiations of 2021-2027 Programmes:**

B2 Unit gave an overview of the main issues observed from draft programmes: they are not always mature or complete (e.g. some figures, indicators, milestones are not included), the methodological document is sometimes absent or incomplete and lacks information on data or evidence used, data reliability assurance, calculation method, assumptions, risks for achieving the milestones and targets. He then presented the expected good practices related to indicators such as using common indicators whenever possible and providing justification, description and calculation of the targets (and milestones, for output indicators) for each indicator (common and programme specific). There should be a clear link between the indicators and the proposed types of actions and a high degree of coverage Milestones set a zero should be duly justified.

On the intervention fields, B2 explained the importance of determining them according to the objective of the action and about the fact the main principles of the 2014-2020 guidance still apply. In case of several intervention fields for one action, they should be used either *pro rata* (the approach encouraged by the Commission), or the one covering the highest proportion of allocated funds should be favoured. He concluded by reminding the audience that the Court of Auditors and the Parliament will closely look at the

climate coefficient, and of the importance of to address made to MAs from one consultation to the other to ensure a swift adoption of the programmes

Unit B2 then presented several issues on the categories of intervention. The co-legislators have restricted the use of the clean urban transport categories (081 and 082) to zero-emission rolling stock and related infrastructures. The MAs who want to invest in clean but non-zero emission urban transport can use the intervention field 077 “Air quality and noise reduction measures”. Justification for air quality improvements must be provided as well as why non-zero emissions transport has not been selected. On energy efficiency, if the main objective is to build or renovate social infrastructures, the codes 121-128 should be used. If the main objective is to increase capacity and improve services of social infrastructures, codes 41, 42, 44 or 45 should be used. Some intervention fields related to seaport and waterways mention the exclusion of facilities where there is transport of fossil fuels. In keeping the fossil fuel exclusion established by ERDF/CF Article 7, most actions can likely be included under these interventions fields..

Finally, Unit B2 informed the network that a new version of the FAQ with all received questions and answers have been uploaded. He encouraged the network and the MAs to look at this document. A more interactive FAQ will also be added on the SFC portal.

### **3- Preview of upcoming documents**

Unit B2 presented the 2021 Annual Summary report to the network. This report is a legal obligation of the Commission and is the sixth one of its sort. It covers the 2014-2020 Implementation period provides a good overview of where we stand with implementation. The financial data will be provided up to 30 September 2021. In addition to presenting some data on the implementation, he talked about the main messages we can keep from this report: ESI Funds are working and delivering; the flexibility granted during the crisis allowed refocus on health and social emergencies; cohesion policy is preparing for future challenges in line with EC priorities.

Unit B2 then presented the Staff Working Document that summarises the evaluations carried out by the Member States and the Commission on ESIF programmes 2014-2020. This document will be published along with the 2021 Annual Summary report. It is organised by policy area, with Cohesion policy in a single section, and covers all ESIF programmes. There are more than 1500 MS evaluations on 2014-2020. Through its Evaluation Help Desk, the EC provides tailored support to the MS evaluations and collects and summarises them. Besides the number of evaluations, we see than more and more evaluations focus on evaluating the impacts (24%). By design, the results are specific to the local contexts. However, some common findings are starting to emerge and Unit B2 presented several of them for different aspects such as the Smart Europe, Green Europe and Inclusive components of the Commission’s strategy, on cross-cutting instruments and on implementation.

Unit B2 also summarised the recent evaluation activities of the EC: an on-going evaluation on RTD infrastructures and activities for ERDF 2007-2013; another one on e-cohesion for ERDF/CF 2014-2020; the on-going preparatory study on data and monitoring systems for 2014-2020; the support provided by the Evaluation Help Desk (systematic review, methodological support, summer school); the evaluation Conference in Porto; and the evaluation network meetings and different online supports. The upcoming activities were also mentioned, in particular the work packages of the ex post evaluation. Through these evaluations, the EC will also investigate in more details the contextual factors that contribute to hamper the positive outcomes of the interventions. Finally, Unit B2 reminded that the EC is fully

committed to supporting the MS and that it is very important to have a good policy and programme design for the 2021-2027 period. In this regard, a clear definition of the success of the interventions will help the future evaluations.

#### **4- Evaluations 2014-2020**

Unit B2 gave an update on the evaluation of e-cohesion. The study should be finalised in Q1 2022 and provide insights on e-cohesion systems in the MS and how they can be used in the next programming period to further increase simplification and reduce the administrative burden. The contractor carried out a mapping of the systems, two case studies of these systems, a large-scale survey to collect data from the users, and a webinar to present the initial findings. Two initial findings: there is a strong agreement that electronic data exchange have brought improvements compared to paper-based processes or email exchanges and that the benefits of e-Cohesion outweigh the costs. Five other case studies will be carried out before drawing conclusions and producing the final report.

The Unit B2 Team leader for evaluation then presented the ex post 2014-2020 evaluation. The whole ex post exercise will be considered as one single evaluation and be implemented through a mix of thematic and cross-cutting work packages. The preparatory study has already been launched. B2 unit communicated the different work packages and their distribution within the unit members:

- **WP 1 Synthesis**
- **WP 2 Preparatory Study**
- **WP 3 Effects of Funding and Context**
- **WP 4 Research and Innovation**
- **WP 5 ICT**
- **WP 6 SME Support**
- **WP 7 Climate and Environment**
- **WP 8 Transport**
- **WP 9 Employment, education and social inclusion**
- **WP 10 Administrative Capacity Building**
- **WP 11 INTERREG**
- **WP 12 Crisis Response**
- **WP 13**

The next step is to launch the call for tenders, which will not happen at the same times for all the work packages. We launched the Inter-Service Group within the Commission and the initiative is on the *Have your say portal*. The thirist three packages will be launched very soon. Unit B2 encouraged the network members to share the news with their own contractors who may want to participate.

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring then presented in more depth the WP 2 which is ongoing and should be finalised in Q1 2022. The contractor has gathered rich project and beneficiary level information detailing the output, and linked the output indicators value to the operations. Then, they have developed typologies for the operations under the different thematic objectives to understand the types of operations that are funded. They have also been examining the underlying programme monitoring system and the common and programme specific indicator values reported. The ultimate purpose of this study is that the contractors for the other work packages will be able to analyse this data to inform their own work and identify the impacts. There will be challenges with this data as it is imperfect and the quality and scope of data is heterogeneous. There have been significant efforts to clean and harmonise the data. This data is not a proof of impact but simply more monitoring information that can complement other methods to evaluate the impact of the programmes. It does not replace the need for evaluation. Unit B2 encouraged the network to be involved in a seminar organised in mid-February where the consortium will present their work and deliverables.

## **5 -Update on the Open Data Platform**

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring presented the latest novelties of the Open Data Platform and recalled the plans to update it in 2022 to display the adopted 2021-2027 programmes. Among recent developments, the 2021-2027 financial allocations became available ([link](#)), alongside a new animated chart on the country pages which shows the 2014-2020 thematic progress on spending ([link](#)). New data was published on 17 December included 1) trends on financial data from 30/09/2021; 2) common indicator target changes and implementation progress towards those targets; 3) Coronavirus non-paper indicator implementation progress in delivering emergency response measures; 4) REACT-EU indicator targets added in 2021. He then presented a series charts showing significant progress but also challenges related to the response to the crisis and to implementation for certain indicators. He concluded by stressing the usefulness of the data in the context of a European Court of Auditors special report on the Coronavirus response including under Cohesion policy and REACT-EU.

The meeting chair thanked the members of the Evaluation Network for their role in promoting and using CV common indicators, which has enabled REGIO to report on such a politically visible aspect of Cohesion policy.

## **6- Presentation of the final report on the evaluation of RTD**

Silvia Vignetti (CSIL Milano) and Jan Kramer (PROGNOS) presented the final report of the study for the evaluation of investments in Research and Technological Development (RTD) by ERDF in the 2007-2013 period. The evaluation focussed on a representative sample of 53 Operational Programmes covering 18 Member States, overall covering 85% of expenditure of the two in-scope codes of expenditure. Evaluation criteria covered were: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, EU added value and sustainability. A combination of different tools and methods was employed: literature review, analysis of monitoring data, 7 case studies at the MS level including 21 deep-dives on selected policy instruments, cross-case analysis, a seminar with the stakeholders and the final report. Econometric analysis was also conducted to bring together the evidence collected. The approach was inspired by theory-based impact evaluation.

The overall assessment of ERDF support for RTD is good. In terms of relevance, in most case studies, the ERDF support addressed the most pressing needs of expansion and modernisation of the national RTD systems, especially for newly accessed MS. Internal coherence was generally high, although external coherence presented some problems (in particular, state aid and competition rules). In terms of efficiency, the money was sufficiently concentrate, but there were some problems with the administrative capacity and the implementation of complex policy instruments. Concerning effectiveness, there were good results on improvement of R&D capacities and increase in the number of R&D personnel, but more limited in terms of commercial valorisation. For sustainability, there were some challenges in the implementation of some large RTD infrastructures. As for EU added value, EU-wide effects were not among the direct, intended effects of funded instrument but they did materialise in the form of a scale effect that allowed some regional RTD systems to make a leap and then potentially become key players at the EU level in the research environment.

REGIO Unit B2 thanked CSIL and Prognos for their excellent work on this evaluation and the innovative elements introduced, such as the “cookbook”, that will probably be use broadly in the ex-post package for the 2014-2020 programming period. The final report of the RTD evaluation can be found at [this link](#).

The Romanian representative asked if the common results indicators for the 2021-2027 period were appropriate to capture results of RDI supported activities within one year after the operation is completed. REGIO B2 acknowledged that there is a time lag between the creation of the intellectual property and its registration and recognition with a patent or a trademark. This was discussed with MAs and, as a result, the

definition of result indicators was adapted to consider the registration of a patent request. Measuring the result indicators at closure or within 12 months of closure is likely to lead to an underestimation, but it would still represent an early signal. Thus, it is important to highlight in the narrative that these results are simply a first measurement captured by the monitoring system.

## **7- Evaluation activities and news from the Member States – Tour de table**

**RO:** A conference will be organised in hybrid format on 9-10 June 2022 in Bucharest with title “Evaluation of ESIF interventions in Europe. Between tradition and innovation”. Evaluations in all sectors are currently in full swing consistently with the evaluation plan, both counterfactual evaluations and macro-economic evaluations.

**CZ:** The Ministry of Regional Development will carry out two big evaluations, one on Partnership Agreements and the other concerning the impact of EU funds on regions. Czech MAs are also doing evaluations on their side.

The Czech representative asked if evaluation reports should be drafted in Czech or English, if it is possible to include any pictures or graphs, and if there is a maximum number of pages allowed. REGIO B2 reminded the network that the regulatory text is the only official guidance regarding reporting obligations. Thus, from a legal perspective, there are no limitations to the report. The template B2 proposed addresses the regulatory requirements. It would be useful if everybody covered its sections as a minimum. It is however possible to further extend it and to add graphs and pictures if they enhance the readability. There is no requirement on the length, but it is preferable to maintain a reasonable length and, if possible, make it available in English as well so that it can reach a wider audience, also beyond the Commission itself.

**IT:** Italy’s Department for Cohesion Policies is proceeding with two workshops on evaluation utilization. The workshops focus on support to 21-27 programmes through collective work on indicators.

**SE:** Sweden is preparing two new evaluations starting in January. One impact evaluation of the Innovation system(s) in Sweden and the role of the ERDF in transforming structures and support for innovation. It will also explore new methods of evaluating smart specialization 2021-2027. The other evaluation is targeting the React-EU investments and will be an on-going evaluation during 2022-2023.

## **Conclusions**

B2 thanked Evaluation Network members for the very constructive sessions and debate, asking to continue to sending questions on evaluation that can be discussed during the next meetings.

## **4. Next steps**

Another Evaluation Network meeting will be organised in Q1 2022.

## **List of participants**

The meeting was attended by 87 participants: 64 governmental experts, 2 participants from Interact Office Vienna, 2 external speakers from the REGIO contractors SCIL and Prognos, and 19 representatives from DG REGIO.