

## Minutes of the expert groups

### Meeting of the Evaluation Network - DG REGIO

16 April 2024, hybrid meeting

(MERO, Avenue de Tervueren 41, 1040 Etterbeek, Room 000/078 + MS Teams)

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

Ana Pires, Head of Unit Evaluation and European Semester in DG REGIO welcomed participants and introduced the agenda of the meeting. Colleagues from MS introduced themselves and new members of REGIO.B2 were introduced. The minutes of the previous EvalNet meeting in October 2023 were approved and uploaded to CIRCABC.

#### 2. Nature of the meeting

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

#### 3. Mid-Term Review 2021-2027

REGIO.B2 presented updates on the mid-term review (MTR) 2021-2027: highlighting the deadline on 31 March 2025; explaining the expected approach; reminding of the importance of the European Semester and the planned adoption of the 2024 Spring Package in June 2024. An MTR webinar is planned for the end of September 2024.

Q&A:

- **DE:** asked how to deal with national obligations in regional programs and if an additional mid-term review on national obligations is necessary.
  - o **REGIO.B2** replied that national obligations will need to be reviewed at national level. For example, through the national reporting on NECPs. Regional programmes with relevant interventions will need consider the progress made at national level and take into account in the MTR assessment.
- **SK:** asked if European semester Country reports and Country specific recommendations will be available in a draft version before 19 June.
  - o **REGIO.B2** replied that MS will receive country reports for fact-checking .
- **DE:** asked if MTR is necessary even if full flexibility is allocated to STEP objectives, but the request is submitted shortly after 31 August 2024.
  - o **REGIO.B2 replied that** the deadline for submission of the amendments is obligatory and cannot be missed. Programmes submitting STEP amendment after the 31/08/2024 deadline will need to conduct MTR.

#### 4. Ex post evaluation state of play and results of SME study

REGIO.B2 explained the objectives of the SME ex post study. The presentation included the description of allocations in absolute and relative terms.

The ERDF money spent for Thematic Objective 3 - competitiveness of SMES - has reached almost 1.8 million SMEs by the end of 2022 (7% of total active European SMEs; EUR 35k of average of EU + national resources). About 70% of these firms received direct financial incentives in the form of both non-repayable grants and financial instruments.

Some of the key findings were highlighted:

- More ambitious and long-term investment strategies facilitate positive and durable effects. In less experienced (and smaller) SMEs, capabilities can be increased through instruments providing business advice. Competitive selection procedures are more effective in selecting high-quality projects
- Place-based approach and targeting strategies: qualitative evidence indicates good targeting, aligned with local needs expressed by SME. Some indications of higher performance when expenditure was aligned with smart specialization strategy sectors.
- Striking a balance between path dependency and experimentation: a learning-by-doing process on the side of managing authorities was observed. There was a continuous updating of the instruments to align them with evolving SME needs and address observed drawbacks.
- Limited synergies with other EU initiatives: achieving structural change necessitates thinking in systemic terms but the evidence of synergies between different instruments is limited.

The final report of this SME ex post evaluation is expected for end-May.

## 5. Summary of evaluation findings

REGIO.B2 presented the [staff working document on Evaluation Findings](#) and the latest trends in the production of evaluations in the MS, which sees an increasing share of impact-oriented evaluations. The main findings were presented, with several examples of evaluations in the MS.

Feedback from the MS included the following:

- **BE:** mentioned that they produced a lot of implementation-related evaluations, but impact evaluation often comes too late. For the future, BE suggested that impact evaluations should be produced earlier in the policy cycle.
- **TC:** mentioned that the impact of several infrastructures takes a long time to materialise and suggested that evaluations took into consideration results from the previous period. However, it also noted that it is complex to follow the results in the long term.
- **EL:** the Greek central coordination unit has completed impact evaluations for 13 regional programmes in 2 key areas – on Smart specialization and Territorial integrated instruments. EL offered to share these impact evaluations and to present them in the following Evaluation Network meeting.
  - o **AT:** in general confirmed the main findings of the SWD and confirmed that administrative burden is an issue.
- **FR:** asked how the results of the 2014-2020 evaluation will be used.
  - o **REGIO.B2** highlighted that the results of the evaluation will feed into the discussions on the future of the policy post-2027. Our goal is also to encourage MS to use the results continuously hence our investment in an Evaluation Library and to influence policy makers in MS and in the European institutions. . REGIO.B2 also asked the participants to send examples of how evaluation findings are used to influence implementation.
- **BE:** asked for an explanation of how indicators work in the case of recurring funding for SMEs.

- **REGIO.B2**: explained that data available to the Commission is aggregated and thus it is not possible to identify recurring funding and avoid double counting. The identity of the enterprises is mostly unknown in monitoring data, so a qualitative assessment of policy instruments is necessary in some cases.
- **HU**: asked REGIO.B2 for examples of how to influence high-level policy makers.
  - **REGIO.B2**: underlined the importance of presenting data in a digestible format. Transparency plays a key role and tools like the Cohesion Open Data Platform contribute to the debate on cohesion policy.

## 6. 2021-2027 Monitoring implementation

**REGIO.B2** thanked MS for submitting almost all 2023 data by the 31 January deadline. While there was an intention to publish 2023 data this was delayed as quality checks were still being prepared. The overall selection rate reported was 12% with low spending. In relation to the EC quality controls being conducted every 6 months, on January and July submissions, the programme data in SFC2021 is locked after its submission, but MA can contact the geographical desk to submit a data correction.

- Some issues were identified in examining the data, such as a small number of cases where project selection appeared to exceed the amount available (flexibility amount) or apparent use of inappropriate measurement units for indicators. **DE**: The DE representative from Thuringia mentioned that their team transmitted Art 42 Tables 1 and 2 to SFC2021 using web services. They experienced quality issues with indicator values in 2014-2020 but were able to correct these thanks to their own data quality checks and the feedback from the REGIO Geo desk (warning lists). For 2021-2027 the time to review indicator data quality problems has been reduced from 5 months to just 1 month which can affect the data quality. DE also mentioned an issue with setting meaningful targets for 2029 as the targets might prove insufficient within just a few years.
  - **REGIO.B2** recalled that the Mid Term review in early 2025 is a good moment to reconsider the targets and assumptions and propose relevant corrections with justifications.
- **HR**: asked for a clarification of how to fill in implementation values
  - **REGIO.B2** explained that this depends on the indicators. For instance, the length of a newly built road would only be reported once the road is finished. On the other hand, if a project consists of renovating 60 buildings it is possible to report those buildings that are finished although the rest is not finished yet.
- **An Interreg representative**: asked where the indicators are published.
  - **REGIO.B2** answered that all the indicators will be available in the Open Data Platform ([link](#)).
- **CZ**: asked if they can start reporting even if their projects have not been completed yet.
  - **REGIO.B2** answered that it is possible to report selected values even if no indicator value are yet implemented.

## 7. DG REGIO 21-27 Common indicator study

**REGIO.B2 informed** about the kick-off of a 2021-2027 common indicator study and the different tasks involved. The evaluation network will be kept informed.

## 8. AOB

**REGIO.B2:** concluded the meeting by highlighting the support available from the Evaluation Helpdesk. This includes trainings, presentations, and feedback on ongoing evaluation. The next Evaluation Summer School will take place in Bologna on 26-28 June.

**REGIO.B2** encouraged MS to share the mid-term evaluation survey with your contacts to boost response rate, to send suggestions of topics for the next Evaluation Network meetings as to inform of the main evaluation conferences or events planned.

### **List of participants**

The hybrid meeting was attended by 69 participants from 25 member states online and 15 representatives from DG REGIO in presence.