# Minutes of the expert groups

Brussels, 19/04/2021

**Minutes**

Evaluation Network meeting with MS
DG REGIO
19/04/2021, WebEx meeting

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

The Head of Unit, REGIO B2 presented the agenda of the two-day webinar. The first day (April 19, 2021) was dedicated to the state of progress in the use of COVID-19 specific indicators, the ex-post evaluation of the 2014-2020 programming period and the methodological support via evaluation helpdesk. During the second day five agenda items were discussed: the categorisation system in 2014-2020 and beyond, an overview of the ongoing evaluation and studies, the expansion of Open Data Platform, the draft template for art. 114 report on indicators and evaluations, and a summary of the Czech evaluations. The Members of the Evaluation Network did not add agenda items before the meeting.
Evaluation Network members were informed that the minutes of the meeting of 10 and 11 December 2020 were uploaded on CIRCABC for feedback. No comments were received on the minutes.

## 2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was organised for members of the Evaluation Network. Due to its online nature, the participation to the meeting was extended, lifting the limit on representatives from each member state that could join.

The meeting Chair encouraged participants to intervene both in the chat and by taking the floor throughout the meeting.

## 3. 2014-2020 COVID-19 indicators: 2021-2027 ERDF, CF, JTF indicators – current state of progress

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring presented the latest developments in relation to the 2014-2020 indicators and the staff working document (SWD) on performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) in 2021-2027.

With regard to the latest development on 2014-2020 indicators, the members were reminded that the Commission proposed a list of COVID-19 specific indicators in a non-paper published in May 2020. This paper was revised in February 2021 to take into account the adoption of REACT EU. The revised non-paper was circulated to the Evaluation Network and other bodies. The revision is occurring prior to the realisation of the vast majority of COVID-19-related projects.

Five new indicators have been added to the revised document. One new indicator, CV60, measures the costs related to vaccinations against the COVID-19 (procurement, distribution, training and administration). The four other indicators, CV61 to CV64, measure the output of specific interventions related to vaccinations. In addition, several indicator codes have been reserved in case new indicators could be used.

Unit B2 also updated the Evaluation Network members regarding the adoption process of the SWD on performance, monitoring and evaluation of the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the JTF in 2021-2027. The SWD has been modified to take account of the compromise found between the co-legislators in February 2021. In addition, the SWD includes the comments provided by the Member States in December 2019, which could not be processed before a compromise was found.

In mid-March, Unit B2 submitted the full revised description of the indicators to an internal consultation in the Commission, which was closed on 9 April. Comments from other Commission services have been taken into account and are still processed by DG REGIO. However, no major changes have been introduced during the internal consultation.

The objective is to adopt the SWD together with the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) and the ERDF/CF regulation. The principle obstacle to the prompt adoption of the legislation is the delay in the adoption of the CPR, which is set for June or July 2021.

Unit B2 then presented the changes introduced by the co-legislators on the ERDF/CF regulation. Two new specific objectives have been added during the last phase of the legislative process. In addition, several categories of interventions have been transferred from one specific objective to another.

The European Parliament added five common indicators. Three indicators concern Policy Objective 2 “Greener low-carbon Europe” of the ERDF/CF regulation, while two indicators were added to the JTF regulation.

The comments provided by the Member States on the indicator fiches in December 2019 were factored in after the political agreement had been reached between the co-legislators. Several corrections and clarifications were made in the fiches. In some rare cases, measurement units and definitions were also modified. Suggestions from the Member States to change the indicator titles could not be accommodated, as titles were agreed by the co-legislators in their final compromise. Some comments linked to specific national circumstances or specific project circumstances were also discarded. For these comments, the Commission will get in contact with the relevant Member States bilaterally to see how to take best account of national specificities.

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring informed the members that the finalised indicator fiches will be circulated by e-mail by the end of May 2021 at the latest; for the benefit of managing authorities in view of the preparation of the next generation of programmes.

The Unit B2 Team leader for evaluation updated the members on the section of the SWD concerning programme level evaluations. He stated that only a few minor comments emerged from the Commission’s interservice consultation. The evaluation section of the SWD is therefore likely to remain stable.

The Head of Unit REGIO B2 also updated the members about a specific issue regarding the corporate performance indicators of the Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF). The list of corporate indicators will be presented in a Delegated Act. For regional funds, the corporate performance indicators are directly entailed in Annex II of the ERDF/CF regulation. Since the thematic areas of investment of the RRF and regional funds greatly overlap, the outputs and results measured should be consistent. However, the RRF indicators contained in the draft Delegated Act are not identical to the core indicators of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. DG REGIO has reached out to other Commission's services responsible for the monitoring process of the RRF in an effort to align the indicators' titles and descriptions. DG REGIO believe that the corporate indicators of the RRF should mirror the indicators currently used under Annex II of the ERDF/CF regulation, as a political agreement was already reached on the latter.

**Discussions**:

ES: Spain is planning to share additional comments and questions on the indicator fiches. These comments are not meant to bring modifications to the indicator descriptions.

**Answer**: Given that a political agreement has been found on the list of indicators, the Commission will not be able to make significant changes to the indicator fiches. However, the Commission is available to answer any question and to discuss any comment on them.

## 4. Ex-post evaluation of the 2014-2020 programming period: state of play

Art. 57 (2) of the CPR requires the Commission to carry out an ex post evaluation of the ESI Funds by the end of 2024. The exercise consists of three phases: scoping, implementation and reporting.

The roadmap of the ex-post evaluation was already presented to Evaluation Network members, and Unit B2 is on track to complete the exercise by 2024; the findings of the ex-post will feed into the impact assessment of the 2021-2027 programming period.

The Unit B2 Team leader for evaluation presented the structure of the ex-post evaluation.

The ex-post evaluation will consist of a mix of cross cutting and thematic packages and one overarching synthesis; this division will allow for the identification of the thematic impacts of the policy, as well as its effect on overall territorial cohesion.

The contractual framework of the ex-post is made of 13 packages, organised according to relevant headline ambitions of the present Commission. Tendering will start in the third quarter of 2021 and will go on until mid-2022.

The management of the packages is distributed among Unit B2 colleagues. Unit B2 will share the progress on the state of play of the overall ex-post and on the progress of individual packages in future Evaluation Network meetings. EvalNet members are invited to share information about the upcoming tenders in their home countries, so to reach as wide a pool of contractors as possible.

To reach the goal of the ex-post, a mix of approaches and methods will be used, including intense dialogue with national, regional and Commission stakeholders through accessible online seminars.

From the point of view of the Better Regulation Guidelines, the whole exercise is considered as one single evaluation and will correspond to one staff working document. Implementation will be reviewed in all work packages, for all categories of intervention; robust impact evaluations will complement this information wherever relevant.

For the first time, the unit of analysis of the ex-post evaluation will be the project level; a preliminary study has already started to collect project-level information in the Member States.

One of the objectives of the ex-post is to create a body of knowledge for Cohesion policy evaluation, as piloted by the ongoing evaluation of 2007-2013 RTD activities.

**Discussion:**

FR**:** What is the headline "an economy that works for people" referring to?

**Answer:** Unit B2 decided to group the evaluation work packages according to the headline ambitions of the current Commission, to highlight that, although Cohesion policy was designed to be the main tool of implementation of Europe 2020 strategy, it is coherent with the current Commission priorities.

The ex-post work will be divided in work packages, each with a different role and thematic (or cross-cutting) focus; the synthesis package will draw conclusions and structure the information contained in the other packages, including how Cohesion policy contributes to each headline ambition.

PT**:** The contractors that are collecting data for preparatory study are asking for all available information at project level, which is surely difficult to process; data collection should be more structured and targeted. Is the same amount of information asked to all countries, at the same level of detail?

What are the methodologies that will be used in the impact evaluations? How will impact evaluation be carried out, considering the great delay in implementation?

**Answer:** Unit B2 remarked that the presentation on the preliminary study planned for the second day of the Evaluation Network (April 20, 2021) would likely answer to the questions concerning data collection. It was also remarked that, while extensive data collection is being carried out in the context of the preliminary study, this information will be used for all the thematic packages, reducing the burden on Managing Authorities. Unit B2 greeted the collaboration of Managing Authorities in this exercise.

The methodology of the ex-post will not be limited to counterfactual methods; the most useful theory-based and theory-informed methods will be identified for each work package.

## 5. Evaluation helpdesk state of play & feedback from methodological support

The Monitoring Help Desk (MHD) reviews all evaluations on Cohesion policy programmes and provides expert support to Managing Authorities on evaluation issues. It also supports DG REGIO with evaluation activity and it organises a summer school to provide training on specific issues.

During the past year, the Help Desk has been supporting Managing Authorities through remote meetings; however useful and open to many participants, these are not a good substitute for in-person meetings.

Mr. Terry Ward (Director, Applica – Monitoring Help Desk) presented the main outputs produced by the MHD, such as country fiches (summarising the evaluation carried out by the Managing Authorities), and thematic reports (summarising evaluation findings across Member States on the different thematic objectives).

The MHD has now reviewed around 1500 evaluations; all the summaries produced are available online at the DG REGIO evaluation library.

The Help Desk remarked that an increasing number of evaluations are trying to assess the impact of Cohesion policy interventions, especially with reference to most recent programmes. The increase in impact evaluations is expected to continue, as outcomes of interventions are becoming more evident and Member States are trying to comply with regulatory requirements.

Mr. Ward presented the types of summary reports prepared by the MHD:

- Summaries focusing on the Member States and on European territorial cooperation reporting: the findings of all evaluations carried out in the two past programming periods; policy implications; strengths and opportunities for improving impact evaluations; feedback from the support meetings offered by the Help Desk.
- Thematic reports for each thematic objective, produced at the end of 2020, summarising the main findings, types of evaluations, geographical coverage, thematic coverage and lessons learned in terms of evaluation design, methods and data used; these reports also include expert comments on methodological issues. These reports are available on CIRCABC, under December Evaluation Network meeting.

The MHD also assists the evaluation activity in the Member States through Support meetings.

Since last November, much of the support has focused on the preparation of the Terms of Reference (TOR) and on the way contractors' proposals for evaluations should be assessed. These meetings included brainstorming activity for the development of evaluation questions; revision of draft TORs; comments on ongoing evaluations; meetings focusing on a specific evaluative method, such as theory-based evaluations; preparation of evaluation plans for the next programming periods.

Evaluation questions, methodological issues, evaluation design and procedural aspects were among the topics often discussed during the meetings.

The MHD has individuated some emerging challenges to the evaluation activity of Managing authorities:

- While many theory-based evaluations have been carried out, very few can be considered an example of good practice;

- The starting point of any evaluation undertaken, not only theory-based evaluations, should be the theory of change. This must always be clearly described for evaluations to be meaningful;
- There is a certain confusion between theory of change and intervention logic: the latter consists of summary information of what can we expect as a result of a particular measure, while a theory of change should go further and explain how the intervention leads to outcomes and why this is the case. The theory of change should also highlight the various links in the causal chain between intervention and outcomes, identify the underlying mechanisms and assumptions, contextual and other factors at work, and consider the time lag between intervention and outcomes. Such a theory of change allows verifying whether causal links and assumptions hold in practice.

## 6. Any Other Business

Each year the Help Desk organises a summer school; Estonian members of the EvalNet have offered to host the 2021 edition. As the online summer school organised in 2020 was not optimal, the objective is to organise the summer school in person, probably in September. Dates, venue and topics will be decided in the coming months.

A survey will be circulated to all members of the Evaluation Network to establish the topic of the summer school; members will be able to express their preference by choosing from a list of options. The survey will also include a call for interest for further support from Evaluation Help Desk.

The evaluation conference that was planned for June in Porto is postponed to the 15 and 16 of September 2021; the conference will be organised in hybrid format. Unit B.2 and PT expressed their wish to be able to meet Evaluation Network members in person in this occasion.

The meeting Chair (Head of Unit, REGIO B.2) expressed her gratitude to Evaluation Network members who submitted evaluation posters to be displayed during the conference.

## 7. Categorisation state of play

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring presented the latest state of play for categorisation in the 2014-2020 period. On 1 March 2020, the Open Data Platform was updated with the financial data until 31 December 2020. The data is presented by category. It can be aggregated at EU level or shown by Member State or by programme.

At EU level, the decided amounts is higher than the planned amounts for many categories of intervention. This corresponds to over programming. Over programming generally happens in the last years of a programme period. It is a useful practice as it avoid the risks that some of the decided projects fail to materialise or that irregularities occur over the programme lifetime which lead to the withdrawal of support to those projects. However, for some programmes over programming is well above 40% of the planned amount, which is less usual. This seems to reflect the high uncertainties regarding the allocation of funding for the last years of the programming period at regional and national level. The COVID-19 crisis and the reallocation and reorientation allowed by the CRII and CRII+ initiatives, together with the additional amounts from REACT EU, are natural explanations of the prudent approach taken by managing authorities.

In addition, data on climate tracking was also updated with the financial values by end of 2020. In several Member States, one can observe that the planned amounts dedicated to climate action have decreased by more than 10%. This results in a clear decrease at EU level in the planned amount for climate actions.

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring also listed the different data stories and datasets that might be of interest for the members of the Evaluation network, concerning climate, biodiversity and clean air. He also presented in further details a data story on the release of the 2020 financial data. For the last years of the 2014-2020 programming period, the narrative regarding financial implementation is progressively shifting from decided values to spending. Lastly, Mr Walsh presented the story on "how to use cohesion categorisation data" that provides practical advises on the use of the categorisation datasets of the Open Data Platform.

Unit B2 presented the latest developments concerning the 2021—2027 categorisation system. As a result of the compromise between the co-legislators, new intervention fields have been introduced under Annex 1 of the CPR.

In 2014-2020, not all intervention fields were used with the same frequency. In order to create a meaningful monitoring system, little used intervention fields were merged with similar ones or eliminated for the 2021-2027 period. On the other hand, to avoid the use of black box codes, broad intervention fields were split and substituted by more detailed categories.

In addition, Annex I of the new CPR now includes the climate and environment tracking coefficients. Climate tracking coefficients were already officially in use in the last programming period, although they have been introduced via an Implementing Act and did not appear in the 2014-2020 CPR regulation. Environment coefficient, on the other hand, were only informally used during the 2014-2020 period and have now been included in the legislation.

For the sake of consistency, the annexes of the CPR and of the RRF concerning climate tracking methodologies were aligned by the co-legislators. In order to do so, "bis" and "ter" codes have been introduced by the Council in Annex I of the CPR.

One example is intervention field code 080 on seaports. An intervention field 080bis was added to introduce a separate subcategory for seaports that are not used for the transport of fossils fuels. In some cases, where the proposal of the Commission had assigned a climate coefficient of 0%, the newly introduced codes give the opportunity of using a code with a climate coefficient of 40% or 100% in case the investment entails, for example, greenhouse gas reduction. The introduction of codes containing "bis" and "ter" in CPR Annex I is temporary. A renumbering will take place so that the codes remain machine-readable.

Despite these changes, the basic principles of the categorisation system remain the same. The categories should be used accurately and reasonably. The categorisation system is not all encompassing and there will always be investments that do not fit perfectly in one of the intervention fields. In such cases, the most similar category should be used. The categorisation system is an information system. Intervention fields do not determine eligibility. Eligibility under ERDF and CF is established by the ERDF/CF regulation, in particular article 6.

Unit B2 then presented the gender equality dimension, which was introduced in the last phases of the legislative process. This categorisation dimension was added under Annex I, table 6bis, of the Common Provisions Regulation. For each intervention, a code should be assigned according to the foreseen impact on gender equality. The codes will have to be assigned by each programme at Specific Objective level.

Code 3, which corresponds to a coefficient of 0%, should be used for interventions that were not found to have an impact on gender equality. Code 2 (40% weight) should be assigned for interventions where gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the intervention. Code 3 (100% weight) should be used for interventions, for which gender equality is the main objective and is fundamental to its design and expected results.

A working group in the Commission is currently fine-tuning the methodology determining how codes should be used at programme level.

Managing authorities are invited to start reflecting about the gender dimension of programme interventions. It should be noted that the envelope dedicated to gender-related action will vary significantly between programmes.

**Discussions:**

LV: Is there an objective for gender equality tracking similar to the objective for climate tracking (i.e. a minimum share of total spent amount dedicated to one horizontal objective)?

**Answer:** There is no regulatory objective concerning the share of gender-related investments.

**5. Ongoing evaluations and studies managed by REGIO B.2 (monitoring study, e-cohesion, RTD evaluation)**

The Unit B2 Team leader for evaluation presented the Study on monitoring data and monitoring systems, focusing on the ongoing tasks. The study has two objectives: provide reliable and robust monitoring data on expenditure and achievement indicators for a thematic ex post evaluation, and enhance the Commission and other stakeholders' understanding of the monitoring systems.

The fourteen months contract, led by a consortium of contractors: PPMI, Prognos and CSIL Milano, started in January 2021. Currently at the stage of task 1 and 2, the study is collecting the list of operations and projects supported under the programmes from two main data sources: the public lists of operations and any additional data collected and stored in the national and regional monitoring systems. The next step is to integrate the datasets from the Managing Authorities into a single database, extend the database with additional data, finally cluster the type of actions further than the intervention fields into typical interventions. Additionally, beneficiaries should also be clustered by type and size. This approach is being piloted in RTD evaluation, which will be presented separately by Unit B2.

Data collection will take place until June, another two months is needed to finalise the extension of the data. The collection of the indicators will take place in September. By December begins the assessment of the monitoring system. The final report will be available by end of February 2022. Ideally, this gathered data will be used in the ongoing evaluation. The tendering of the thematic evaluations will start in the third quarter of 2021, during which the data will be made available to the contractor in order to assess how it is analysed in terms of operations and projects.

In practice undertaking such task seems more complex. From January onwards, the study Core Team searched, collected and screened the list of operations available, while checking whether the minimum set of information requested by Annex 2 of the CPR allows for a completion of the list. Unfortunately, the data required by the CPR is not always fully available or in a consistent manner, requiring the contractor to ask for clarification and additional data. The main causes may be that the definition of an operation is not the same in every monitoring system, therefore the way the data is registered differs across systems and countries.

Unit B2 presented questions raised during data collection by the contractor. The data regulation is covered by a delegated regulation of the CPR. Personal data at beneficiary and recipient level is not required and should not be shared. The data gathered is protected by a confidentiality clause.

Unit B2 presented the progress of the e-cohesion systems evaluation in the Member States for the 2014-2020 programming period, as per Article 122(3) of the CPR. E-cohesion systems hold two key principles: encode-only-once principle and the interoperability of other systems. Further details regarding how e-cohesion systems should be organised and the minimum requirements they should comply with are contained in the Commission Implementing Regulations 1011 of 2014. E-cohesion systems are also required for the 2021-2027 programming period. The present evaluation will therefore be a learning exercise.

The aim is to collect information on the systems in place, identify a few good practices as well as the challenges encountered by the authorities in setting up these systems, in the end to make all this information available to the national authorities at an early stage of the 2021-2027 programming period.

The e-cohesion evaluation started at the end of 2020, led by three contractors: PPMI, Rechenwerk and Ismeri, and will be finalised at the beginning of 2022. The main activities and deliverables are to obtain a mapping of all the e-cohesion systems in place for all operational programmes funded by ERDF and the Cohesion Funds, including Interreg programmes. For this, the contractor has to conduct large-scale surveys to capture user experience of the Managing Authorities, intermediate bodies, audit authorities, certifying authorities and beneficiaries in order to assess administrative cost and burden. Large scale surveys will be organised just before the summer of 2021, followed with a webinar with Member State authorities in which contractors will share the result of the surveys and encourage comments. This will be followed by an in-depth analysis of five good practice systems, identified based on the replies to the large-scale surveys. Afterwards the contractor will look into what can be improved and identify the main challenges. When delivering the final report, the contractor is asked to create rich visual supports in the form of fiches for Member States and Interreg programmes.

Unit B2 additionally presented the very preliminary results of the evaluation: the mapping exercise of e-cohesion systems in the Member States for ERDF and Cohesion Funds including Interreg programmes. In order to conduct the preliminary mapping without having to contact directly Managing Authorities, the contractor firstly analysed all the open sources, looking into a number of specific documents which they had access through SFC. The findings provided a typology and mapping of systems, which demonstrates that most Member States have one single system covering all the regions in the country. There are a few Member States with two systems in place, one with four, and two outliers: Germany with 14 systems, Italy with 28. The contractor thus has contacted Member States to clarify. In the case of Germany, it seems each state uses its own e-cohesion system and for the time being two of them have none. In Austria, several intermediate bodies may be using their own systems while there is a central system. In Belgium, for one operational programme there is no system identified. For Interreg the situation is a bit simpler as many programmes use the eMS system provided by the Commission via INTERACT. Other sets of Interreg programmes use one of the regions involved's system. While some use specific e-cohesion systems designed for that programme. Having completed the mapping, the contractor is now looking into two systems in Estonia and Greece to be piloted in the context of the in-depth analysis. The review of the Estonian case has been carried out while the Greek case is ongoing.

The following step is to conduct the large-scale surveys, for which the contractor will develop five sets. These must be short while at the same time gather as much information as possible, as they will be the only source of evidence in the absence of any monitoring data.

The contractor will provide recommendations for the next programming period.

Unit B2 then presented the latest developments on the ex-post evaluation of RTD infrastructures and activities for the 2007-2013 programming period.

In the 2007-2013 period, investments funded within two categories of expenditures: RT support to RTD experts in research centers, and support to infrastructure and centers of competence in a specific technology, amounted in total to €15 billion.

The evaluation started with a general review of the selected operational programmes that cover 65% of the overall expenditures in those categories. Collection of data at project level for projects and beneficiaries alike led to the possibility of mapping the interventions to policy instruments and interventions, giving a clear and uniform taxonomy that corresponds to one of the most important outputs of task 1. The literature and documentary review partly supported this first stage and the second part of the evaluation that started with case studies in some Member States. The results of the case studies are currently being analysed. The outlook is to get the final report in early summer in view of completing the activity and publishing the staff working document by the end of 2021.

The project data collection led to the development of a database, thoroughly published on the Open Data Platform. This story presents a taxonomy that classifies the contribution by field of science of the projects supported.

Regarding the activities carried out during the evaluation, the case studies focused on specific policy intervention in a view to compare the results of interventions implemented in different contexts. For this, stakeholder consultation was heavily relied on with more than 200 interviews. Theory-based analysis was used to understand the factors that contribute to the success of the intervention or that hamper its achievements. The four types of policy interventions chosen for this cross case study analysis are research infrastructure, research activities at the individual level (one beneficiary), collaborative form (more than one beneficiary), and ICT based infrastructure. Theory-based analysis was applied to identify theory-of-change for the different policy interventions. This approach allows us to understand what influenced the effects, what were the different causes, whether the observed effects led to the expected result or unexpected ones. The most important in this context are the analysis of contributing factors, the preconditions for success or risks that could affect a successful implementation together with the analysis of unintended results. Once all this information has been analysed and have identified the keys to success, we aim to create a cookbook which gathers lessons and main findings, provide recommendations for an effective design of the different types of intervention, and overall a stand-alone document for policymakers.

A public seminar held on 7 May will present the emerging findings and collect additional feedback from stakeholders.

## 6. Open Data Platform: planned expansion to REACT-EU+ 2021-2027 programming

The Unit B2 Team leader for monitoring presented the latest update regarding REACT-EU. As part of the reprogramming, additional funds were made available under Next Generation EU, further reinforcing Cohesion Policy in the post pandemic context. At this stage, approximatively 14 billion euros have already been allocated into tranche, the largest one in 2021. The first adopted amounts are already visible under the finances plans of the ERDF and ESF on the Open Data Platform. A new REACT-EU thematic page will be posted soon after the meeting, together with a data story providing further information about the allocations by category of intervention and about climate tracking under REACT-EU.

He also presented the ongoing work on the extension of the Open Data Platform to the next programming period. The objective of this work stream is to introduce the 2021-2027 programmes in a coherent way on the Open Data Platform. The web interface represents the biggest challenge, with questions regarding how to present the two programming periods in parallel. The Open Data storage, which provides several interactive services such as downloading, reusing, visualizing, also needs to be revamped.

The Open Data Platform to date presents a very public and transparent face. In relation to the scope of the platform, it is planned to integrate the following funds to the extended platform: the three Cohesion Policy funds, the Just Transition Fund, the Instrument for Pre Accession and Neighbourhood development and International Cooperation Instrument, the CAP funds, the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and the three HOME funds (AMIF, ISF, IBMF). DG EMPL, MARE, AGRI and HOME are working along with REGIO to allow for these funds to be displayed on the platform.

Unit B2 presented the updated platform's design. The main focus having been to present the two programming periods in a user-friendly and intuitive way, renewing the display while maintaining the elements and avoiding being too disruptive and confusing. The new programming period concerns more funds and therefore generates more data. The platform provides a hosting service for other DGs and non-Cohesion funds. Only Cohesion funds will be aggregated.

The publishing of the information will start at the end of the year 2021. At the beginning mostly planned values will be shared. Additional data regarding implementation will be gathered and added from 2022 onwards.

The platform will move away from the ESIF label, as it does no longer exists in the current legislation. The rebranding will focus on Cohesion Open Data. At this stage, Unit B2 is working on preparing contractual obligations for the new contracts with external companies. The extended platform will be launched by the end of this year or beginning of next year.

User satisfaction surveys are carried out every two years, the third round took place in 2020. The surveys are meant to check whether the platform suits its users' needs. The responses highlight most users would like more detailed data, at project level for instance. Respondents also stress that they would like having as many common elements between the two programming periods as possible to make large time span comparisons.

**Discussions:**

ES: In the current period, when values of indicators in operations after implementation are higher than the values estimated in the selection of operations, geographical units oblige us to change the estimated values. Will it be the same in the next programming period? As it creates administrative burden.

**Answer:** It relates to the definition of selection. Unit B2 considers that selection is the sum of implemented values and what is it in the project pipeline. If values are not cumulated, one could arrive to an uncomfortable situation where for example implementation is higher than selection. This is not in line with the whole logic. Selected values are used to see in advance what will be delivered by Cohesion policy. Like that the indicator becomes obsolete if it contains different values than the real implementation of the actual project. Answer is contained in the staff working document on monitoring and evaluation of the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the JTF in 2021-2027.

Unit B2: To close the Open Data point, we have received questions regarding all the recommendations we receive from the surveys. We received very valuable suggestions. Very active respondents in the surveys. We cannot see the names but the profiles. Many of which are researchers. We will consider the recommendations but some of them are difficult to address. Such as project level details: we do not receive such except through punctual studies like the data of the monitoring study currently ongoing. We do appreciate recommendations and they have strongly influenced some of the stories we have made.

**7. Draft template for Article 114 report on indicators and evaluation**

The Unit B2 Team leader for evaluation presented the draft template of the report required by Article 114 of the Common Provisions Regulation. Article 114 requires that Managing Authorities submit to the Commission the findings of their evaluations and the main outputs of the operational programme they are managing.

It is expected that by the end of 2022 not all evaluations will have been finished, as the programming period ends in 2023. Impact evaluations can be done after the release of the report but the ones for which information is available must be included in it.

While there is no regulatory template, Unit B2 has prepared a draft template to help the Evaluation Network members fulfill the requirements of article 114 without giving too much overhead. In its template, the Commission proposes to present findings of evaluations by priority axis of the operational programmes, its investment priorities and its output and/or result indicators. The template is divided into three parts: the overview of the evaluation work, the findings by priority axis and by result and output indicators, and the general conclusions.

Unit B2 elaborated on the structure and content of the template. The template contains an Annex where all evaluations concerning the operational programme should be listed. For the second part of the template, a short fictive example was presented for one priority axis of an operational programme.

**Discussions:**

**Answer:** It seems all the questions asked in the chat circle around the policy intent. It is to follow up on the result orientation of the operational programme. A result indicator is an impact type of indicator that measures the changes attributed to the intervention. The purpose of impact evaluation is to disentangle the contribution of the intervention itself from other causes. To the extent possible, the report should aim to show the results achieved by the interventions. It is however obvious that the report can be solely based on the information available for each operational programme.

BG: It would be useful if these informations were related in some excel file, that we could search easily to track the measures undertaken.

**Answer:** The report will be communicated to the Commission through SFC. Unit B2 recommends that the Member States create a static version in pdf, containing the information, and upload additional files. In this case it would be important to use the same structure to understand how the information is organised across.

LV: Our main concern is the link between the findings of evaluations and the indicators that explained by Unit B2. When performing evaluations, little emphasis is put on indicators.

**Answer:** Managing Authorities can select which indicators to put in. Result indicators are more important when it comes to the policy than the output indicators. Unfortunately, there are very few results achieved yet. The reason Unit B2 relates the two is because it believes that for well-structured operational programmes, findings are linked to the main outputs and results.

Article 114 of the CPR is applicable to all ESI Funds. However, it only concerns the operational programmes, not the partnership agreements.

IT: The template has a high potential of being very rigid and not accommodate the diversity of the issues covered by evaluations.

**Answer:** It should cover the evaluations of the operational programmes as this is the purpose of the template. Regarding how it is taken by the reporting officer, we have a matrix in the DG where we discuss evaluation issues with the reporting officers upon your agreement. This template will also be presented to them.

AT: Indicators in the 2014-2020 period as opposed to the previous one are often reporting on macro regional values and are in fact not very good in explaining what the programme achieves. The results of the intervention are very hard to disentangle from other causes. Every evaluation tries to identify and isolate the effect of the programme interventions but it is very challenging to do so with the result indicators used in 2014-2020.

**Answer:** This is a very important issue raised and one of the main reasons why the Commission has proposed to change the indicator system. For the 2014-2020 period, Unit B2 expected that the result indicator would be selected at the level which can be influenced by the programme.

LT: Which type of evaluation should be included in the report?

**Answer:** All evaluations covering the operational programme concerned by the report, including evaluations covering several programmes, should be included in the report. Unit B2 encourages Managing Authorities to define their own cutoff date that is relevant, suitable and feasible.

RO: Will the text be restricted?

**Answer:** The template is a suggestion. From B.2 side we cannot know what will be included and at what length. You can report in the way you understand Article 114 of the CPR. The template should be a facilitating tool, not something limiting or restrictive.

FR: Can it be written in another language than English?

**Answer:** This is not regulated, but the use of English would facilitate the inclusion of the report in the broader reporting exercise of the Commission.

**8. Summary of Czech evaluations and guidance to the contractors**

The Head of Evaluation Unit, Ministry of Regional Development of Czech Republic presented the third edition of Summary of evaluations conducted in the Czech Republic. CZ is the country that has done the most evaluations, up to 61 in the year 2020. The goal is to bring some evidence from European and international level for the benefit of stakeholders. Partners from Managing Authorities and units present the findings to their managers and stakeholders yet they do not have this comprehensive overview of different operational programmes. The document has proved very useful to managers.

CZ additionally created an evaluator's guide, which mainly consist of informal recommendations to partners and colleagues from the field. The guide is for the benefit of contractors and colleagues at the Evaluation unit. It includes the following sections that may be of relevance for other Member States: 1) evaluation unit and the concept of knowledge-breaker, 2) procurement of evaluation contracts, 3) minimum methodological standards, 4) evaluation outputs and 5) communication around evaluations.

Overall the document is a strong communication tool and can be of use for not only informed stakeholders but also appealing to the general public.

**Discussions:**

LV: Could you reflect on the impact of the performance of the evaluators?

CZ: This was published in Spring 2020, and we have so far received positive feedback from newcomers in the evaluation field. At this point we notice small steps and proof that the document is used. We notice also contractors using it. Through this guide we are happy to start a broader debate regarding the role of our internal evaluation unit.

## 9. Conclusions

On 16-17 September 2021 will take place the 9th Conference on the Evaluation of EU Cohesion Policy, in Porto, Portugal.

Unit 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.

## 10. Next meeting

The next meeting will likely take place in late June 2021; the exact date will be communicated as soon as possible.

## 11. List of participants

The Evaluation Network meeting with Member States that took place on 19-20 April 2021, was attended by 81 governmental experts from 25 Member States (missing SI and LU), 2 experts from the Evaluation Helpdesk contractor APPLICA, 2 experts from INTERACT Office Vienna, and 16 REGIO Unit B2 colleagues.