



European  
Commission

## BUILDING EVIDENCE BASE FOR COHESION POLICY POST-2020

### *Implementation of the performance frameworks in the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds*

#### **OBJECTIVE**

The overall objective of this study is to assess how the provisions relating to the performance framework have been implemented in all 28 Member States (MSs) during the programming of the ESI Funds.

#### **KEY MESSAGES**

- \* Performance frameworks are perceived as helping to give the programmes clearer focus and direction, as well as setting realistic expectations in terms of results.
- \* Development of the performance frameworks has generated considerable debate and exchanges within MSs and between MSs and the Commission.
- \* MSs have made efforts to establish the performance framework on a solid basis.
- \* The choice of indicators for milestones and targets was in line with Commission guidance.
- \* Setting milestones and indicators was mainly a straightforward task.

#### **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

##### **Strengths:**

- \* Better steering and guiding of programme implementation.
- \* Helped to define realistic targets and expectations.
- \* Dialogue and internal discussions and reflections have been fostered among various stakeholders at the national and European level.
- \* The role of common output indicators has been strengthened.

##### **Weaknesses:**

- \* The elaboration of performance frameworks has been mainly handled by experts at a technical level, which may limit ownership of the performance framework.
- \* Risk of conservative target setting.
- \* Striking the right balance between shorter-term output-based indicators and the drive for long-term results.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

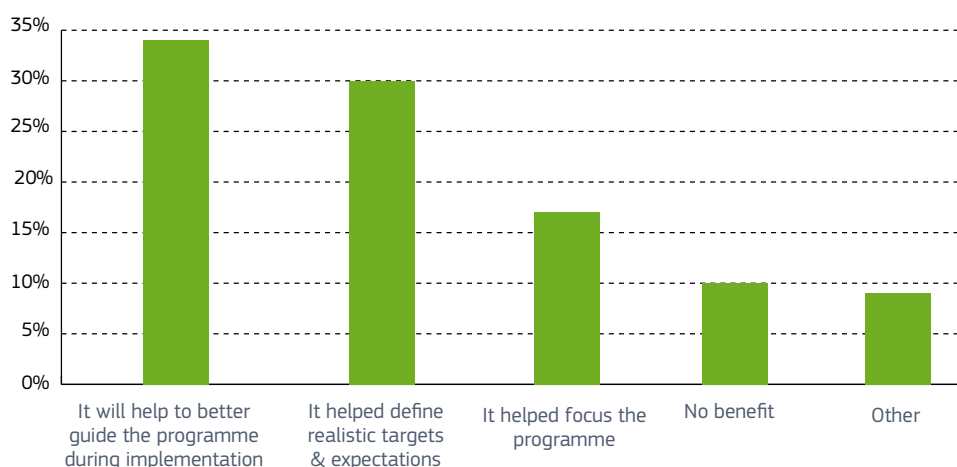
### The study fulfilled the following specific objectives:

- Provide a synthesis of how the provisions relating to the performance framework (including the performance reserve) are reflected in all Partnership Agreements (PAs), Operational Programmes (OPs) financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), including multi-fund programmes, and European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) programmes financed by the ERDF.
- Provide an assessment of how the provisions relating to the performance framework have been designed during the programming phase.
- Provide conclusions on strengths and weaknesses with regard to the application of the provisions relating to the performance framework during the programming phase, as well as first conclusions on the added value of this new element in the regulatory framework.

## MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ **Performance frameworks are perceived as helping to give the programmes clearer focus and direction, as well as setting realistic expectations in terms of results.** The web survey results demonstrate that only a minority of 10% of the respondents mentioned experiencing no benefits from the performance framework. All others identified certain positive aspects of the performance framework in the context of the better result orientation of programmes and PAs. The set-up of the performance frameworks is largely expected to be beneficial for guiding the programmes during their implementation and has been deemed useful for setting realistic targets and performance expectations.

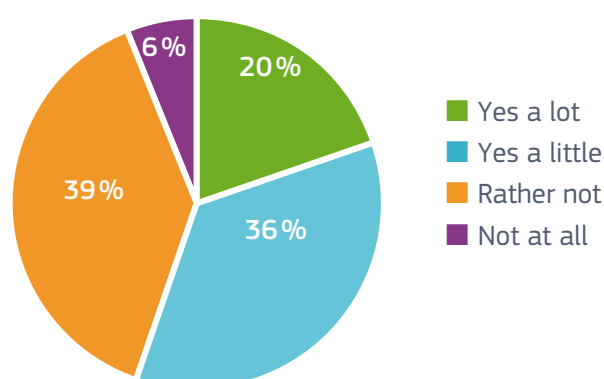
### The main benefits of the performance framework



- ▶ **Development of the performance frameworks has generated considerable debate and exchanges** within the MSs and between MSs and the Commission. MSs have taken this exercise seriously and have taken various actions to ensure coordination. Seminars, national guidelines, regulations and generally harmonised procedures (e.g. uniform definitions of indicators across a MS) were often applied in the EU MSs: nearly 70% of all MSs applied harmonised procedures, 57% had national guidelines, around 54% held seminars and approximately one-third of all EU MSs had regulations to ensure consistency in the performance framework functioning.

- ▶ **MSs have made efforts to establish the performance framework on a solid basis.** The development of the performance framework was largely based on programme-specific documents, such as Annual Implementation Reports from previous programming periods, previous programming documents and internal monitoring and evaluation reports. Thus, past experience played a major role in developing the indicators used in the performance frameworks. It was the most important guide for the selection of indicators and defining milestones and targets for performance frameworks. In addition, various types of estimations and forecasting were used to ensure that the milestones and targets reflected the funding sources available as well as the implementation time scale. In most cases, discussion with experts or within relevant groups played a role in fine-tuning the figures.
- ▶ **The choice of indicators for milestones and targets was in line with Commission guidance.** Financial and output indicators are most frequently used in performance frameworks. Common output indicators and programme-specific output indicators are used equally. Key implementation steps are used to a lesser extent (only in 25 % of all priority axes). The highest proportion of key implementation steps in performance frameworks (19 %) can be found in those under T07. Result indicators were only used for the European Social Fund (ESF).
- ▶ **Setting milestones and indicators was mainly straightforward.** Setting up a methodology for selecting indicators and setting milestones and targets for the performance framework was acknowledged as not particularly difficult by 39 % of the OPs in the web survey, 36 % indicated they had a few difficulties, 20 % had many difficulties, and 6 % had none. Developing the performance framework for complex priorities and specific delivery modes was not easy – both with respect to dealing with the complexity of the task and the resources needed to accomplish it. Identifying indicators which sufficiently reflect the scope of complex priorities, combining investment priorities from different thematic objectives without increasing the total number of indicators, was challenging.

#### **Difficulty in establishing a methodology and criteria to select indicators for the performance framework**



Overall, the preliminary assessment of indicators was given a good rating by the national experts in relation to the majority of the Annex II criteria of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. However, it will only be possible to assess whether the indicators included in the performance framework are indeed appropriate and can be closely linked to realities on the ground once experience of actual implementation has been gained.

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

### Strengths:

- Better steering and guiding of programme implementation.
- Helped to define realistic targets and expectations, and increased focus in programming.
- Strengthened coordination and the possibility of building synergies between ESI Funds.
- Dialogue and internal discussions and reflections has been fostered between various stakeholders at the national and European level; the need to establish a performance framework has triggered reflections and discussions on the setting of objectives, monitoring of progress and on implementing greater focus on results within MSs and with the Commission.
- The role of common output indicators – which applies to 50% of all PF output indicators – has been strengthened, thereby increasing the overall performance comparability across all programmes.

### Weaknesses:

- The elaboration of performance frameworks has been perceived as rather complex and was mainly handled by experts at a technical level. This may limit ownership of the performance framework at the political level and thus the potential it has for guiding the programme implementation.
- Risk of conservative target setting (even if not confirmed by the preliminary assessment by national experts).
- Striking the right balance between shorter-term output-based indicators, milestones, etc. on the one hand, and the drive for long-term results, supported by evaluation and policy learning, on the other remains a challenge.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

### The study is based on:

- ▶ A desk review of 28 PAs and 282 programmes (207 Investments in Growth and Jobs (IGJ) programmes, 75 ETC programmes) as well as related *ex-ante* evaluations. However, not all of the programmes had been approved at the time of analysis, which means that some of the data may have changed subsequently (46 programmes – 13 IGJ programmes and 33 ETC programmes had not been approved at the time of the analysis). In addition, the extra information provided by the programme bodies regarding the methodology and criteria for establishing the performance frameworks was also analysed, where available;
- ▶ 60 interviews with programme representatives covering all 28 MSs and a focus group with Commission representatives;
- ▶ 161 responses received through a web survey targeting Managing Authorities, *ex-ante* evaluators and other stakeholders involved in establishing the performance framework.

### More information:

Full study: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/policy/how/studies\\_integration/impl\\_pf\\_esif\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/studies_integration/impl_pf_esif_report_en.pdf)  
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