



# **MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE JASPERS INITIATIVE IN 2014–2020**

## Final Report

N° 2017.CE.16.BAT.094

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**Preface:**

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this evaluation is to analyse the contribution made by services provided by the Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) to the development of high-quality, mature infrastructure projects and to the development of administrative capacity of managing authorities and beneficiaries in preparing such projects. The evaluation addresses five evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value) in line with the Better Regulation Guidelines<sup>1</sup>.

The evaluation shows that JASPERS advisory services, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services positively contribute to achieving JASPERS' objective of improving the maturity of projects and project applications. At the stage of this mid-term evaluation, it is harder to discern the extent to which they are having an impact on improving the administrative capacity of national authorities. Review services provided by JASPERS are found to be important in acting as a quality filter and facilitating the process of appraisal and approval of major projects. While a great deal has already been achieved in terms of improvements in the delivery of JASPERS services, there is room for further improvements in the delivery of such services in order to increase their EU added value in the preparation and implementation of projects.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2017), Better Regulation Guidelines.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report is the [Final Report](#) of the [Mid-term Evaluation of the JASPERS initiative in 2014–2020](#). The report contains the key findings of the evaluation and is supported by evidence presented in the First Interim Report (Appendix A to this report), the Second Interim Report (separate report), the Online Targeted Consultation Report (Appendix D) and the Seminar Report (Appendix E).

### **Scope of the study**

The [objective](#) of the [Mid-term Evaluation of the JASPERS initiative in 2014–2020](#) is to assess the implementation of the JASPERS initiative. The [Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions \(JASPERS\)](#) initiative was created with the aim of providing technical advisory support to EU Member States and IPA countries in managing EU funds and in the preparation and implementation of high-quality projects co-financed by the European Commission. JASPERS provides several types of services to beneficiary countries, including technical advisory services to ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support under the ESIF and IPA mandates and review services (Independent Quality Review and Post-Submission Appraisal) under the ESIF mandate.

The evaluation is conducted in line with Article 2.4 of the 'Framework and Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020' between the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Commission (EC) and focuses on the implementation of the JASPERS initiative in the programming period 2014–2020.

### **Methodological approach**

The mid-term evaluation is designed in line with the Better Regulation Guidelines and assesses the performance of JASPERS across all specific mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA) and all types of activities (technical advisory, review, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support) undertaken in the programming period 2014–2020. The evaluation builds on the Evaluation Roadmap and the tender specifications based on the five evaluation criteria: [relevance](#), [effectiveness](#), [efficiency](#), [coherence](#), [EU added value](#).

The evaluation consists of 5 interlinked tasks: Task 1 (Methodological Report), Task 2 (Review of JASPERS activities in the years January 2014–December 2018), Task 3 (In-depth evaluation of selected JASPERS assignments), Task 4 (Consultation activities) and Task 5 (Final Report with conclusions and recommendations).

Key data collection included: desk analysis of documents, portfolio analysis covering all JASPERS services as of January 2014 to December 2018, an in-depth assessment of 90 individual assignments<sup>2</sup> (based on desk review of over 400 documents including project fiches, action completion notes, value added fiches and others), and 101 interviews with beneficiaries, managing authorities, project promoters, in-depth interviews with 14 European Commission representatives, interviews and questionnaires with JASPERS services, 6 country fiches on national experiences with JASPERS including field visits and in-person interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities, a targeted online consultation collecting 210 responses, and a stakeholder seminar held in Brussels on 19 September 2019 involving approximately 80 participants.

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<sup>2</sup> Since some of the selected assignments were 'linked' to other assignments (e.g. Technical Advisory linked to PSA or IQR or vice versa), an additional 30 assignments were also assessed to gather a comprehensive picture of the full support received by JASPERS services on selected projects.

The mechanism for financing JASPERS services relies on Specific Grant Agreements (SGA) concluded with the European Commission. SGAs are based on an ex-ante estimate of the demand for services under each mandate. So far, the actual expenditures have been lower than the budgets set out in the annual or multi-annual SGAs for all mandates other than CEF (for which this analysis is not possible based on available data). Furthermore, the mechanism for financing JASPERS services does not include performance indicators or indication of outputs to be achieved linked with the level of financing, but payments are based ex-post as cost reimbursement of FTE. The evaluation finds that JASPERS may consider strengthening its internal resource planning and management system.

### **Technical advisory services**

**Technical advisory** services are the core type of services provided by JASPERS covering a proportion of 62% (i.e. 678) of all JASPERS assignments in the analysed period. Technical advisory services have the overarching objective of ensuring the swift preparation and approval of projects in tandem with a high level of project quality and project documentation. Technical advisory services support beneficiaries and managing authorities in planning and optimising ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects.

JASPERS technical advisory services are found to be **relevant** in meeting the needs of the beneficiaries, i.e. in terms of priority sectors and country coverage, as well as in terms of the focus of the assistance provided (i.e. support in preparing projects and project documentation). However, while the uptake of (and demand for) advisory services for ESIF major projects is high, the uptake of advisory services for IPA and CEF projects has been modest. The main reasons behind this are identified as the different levels of requirements for project approval under the different mandates and low awareness at beneficiary level of the possibility of obtaining JASPERS support.

The evaluation finds a mixed picture when it comes to the **effectiveness** of JASPERS advisory services in supporting the timeline and good-quality delivery of mature projects. For ESIF major projects, the evaluation finds that JASPERS-assisted ESIF major projects have a faster appraisal and approval timeline compared to non-assisted major projects (on average, 85 days faster for those undergoing independent quality review; 15 days faster for those undergoing post-submission appraisal). Similarly, interruptions to ESIF major projects assisted by JASPERS are on average shorter (by 34 days) than for non-assisted projects. This is interpreted as evidence of a positive effect on the timeline of approval of projects. For ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects, due to limitations concerning the availability of data on timeline at the level of the portfolio, no overall conclusion can be drawn. Evidence from the in-depth analysis of the sample of assignments and interviews for such projects depicts a divergent picture concerning the scale and direction of the effect of advisory services on the timelines of such projects.

JASPERS technical advisory services for ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects are found to be comprehensive and to cover a variety of issues, in particular advice in relation to e.g. option analysis (72% of projects analysed), demand analysis (67% of projects analysed) and project grant application support (62% of projects analysed). The evaluation finds that JASPERS had a major impact on improving compliance with EU rules in a large proportion of projects analysed (86% of cases analysed). Furthermore, the evaluation finds for ESIF major projects that JASPERS-assisted projects tend to have fewer interruptions and fewer critical issues than non-assisted projects, which is interpreted to be an indication of a positive effect of advisory services on the quality of projects. However, the findings concerning the effect of JASPERS on the design, scope and outputs of projects are less conclusive. Circumstantial evidence from the analysis of the sample of projects and online targeted consultation suggests that in some cases JASPERS

contributed to improvements in projects in terms of their design and cost savings but this finding cannot be generalised to the full portfolio of assignments.

Finally, the evaluation also assessed the concern raised by the ECA special report about a potential conflict between the objectives of JASPERS by way of a trade-off between the 'timeliness' and 'quality' of projects. The findings of the evaluation do not point to a clear conclusion. However, circumstantial evidence from specific cases points to a potential trade-off between quality over timeliness generated by the decision of Member States to submit applications faster and obtain certification of expenditure.

In terms of [efficiency](#), JASPERS technical advisory services are characterised by demand-driven management: planning and management of resources are guided by the requests of beneficiaries. Monitoring of time spent on individual assignments has been introduced since February 2017, but no precise indications are provided ex-ante on the expected use of resources or deliverables or output to be produced. At project level, the cooperation with beneficiaries is efficient, but there is limited evidence of cost savings generated by JASPERS. Analysis suggests that while there is a general perception among stakeholders that JASPERS frequently generates cost savings, this effect is less evident when individual assignments are analysed, and the nature of cost savings is scrutinised. The only clear cost-saving aspect is related to the avoidance of cumbersome procurement procedures to access JASPERS services, as compared to possible market alternatives.

The advice provided by the JASPERS advisory services is found to be overall [coherent](#) with EU guidance. However, some cases of differences were identified between advisory views and the issues highlighted by the European Commission. Furthermore, JASPERS advisory and review services are found to be internally coherent, although some cases of inconsistencies or differences in conclusions between advisory and review were found. JASPERS technical advisory support was coherent with other advisory schemes that the projects also benefited from. However, the dual role of JASPERS (as both reviewer and advisor) is perceived by the beneficiaries as challenging when the advice coming from one JASPERS function is different to that coming from another.

The [EU added value](#) of JASPERS technical advisory services stems from its methodological, technical expertise and experience across countries. JASPERS services are flexible and the added value of the transfer of knowledge and skills through both the hands-on approach and the provision of advice is valuable to the beneficiaries. Although other advisory and technical assistance schemes may provide similar review services, their scope and type (both thematic, sector and geographical) is generally different than JASPERS, as is the level of EU expertise and knowledge of such schemes. There are only a few alternative schemes that provide services similar to JASPERS (EIB-PASSA, EIAH) but these are found to complement (provide service at different stages) rather than overlap with JASPERS services. The phasing-out of JASPERS technical advisory is seen by managing authorities and beneficiaries as a risk to the quality of projects. However, the Member State representatives who were interviewed were unsure whether they would actually pay for JASPERS advisory assistance.

### ***Capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services***

[Capacity building services](#), which represented only 5% of the portfolio of assignments, have the objective of enhancing skills and knowledge in national administrations and supporting the preparation of good quality investment projects via targeted training. For [horizontal and strategy support](#), which represented 17% of the portfolio assignments, the objective is to provide support upstream in the preparation of strategies and plans. The assignments are not project-specific, but

often sector-specific and concern, for example, national transport strategies, waste management plans and integrated urban development strategies.

Capacity building and horizontal and strategy services are generally both found to be **relevant** and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries. The information gathered and the perception of the stakeholders show that JASPERS capacity building services are largely relevant to meet the needs of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, (particularly in countries with relatively high capacity of national authorities) hands-on capacity building through technical advisory assignments and targeted (e.g. focusing on one sector) training are preferred to more general capacity building courses. The horizontal and strategy support services are found to be a relevant tool to meet the needs of the national authorities requesting support for the preparation of strategies and prioritising projects. Nevertheless, there is a need for better planning of horizontal and strategy support assignments, as indicated by the high proportion of administratively closed horizontal and strategy support assignments (19%).

Capacity building and horizontal and strategy support are found to be **effective** in generating expected results and outputs. At the end of 2018, 41% of capacity building assignments and 41% of horizontal and strategy support were still ongoing. Effects arising from the implementation of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support assignments are likely to be more visible in the longer term but less likely to be observable in the short-term. Nevertheless, the evaluation finds that capacity building assignments organised by JASPERS have a wide outreach in terms of targeted participants, coverage of relevant themes and the development and dissemination of tools and methods for project preparation. Furthermore, the capacity building activities are found to have resulted in the transfer of knowledge related to, inter alia, cost-benefit analysis, environmental legislation and climate change legislation, which has improved skills in public administrations with regard to developing investment projects. **Horizontal and strategy support** assignments are also found to be effective in achieving their individual objectives in terms of the development of strategies, preparation of operational programmes, development of guidelines, and preparation of pipeline and master plans. 83% of the selected horizontal and strategy support assignments analysed are found to be effective in reaching their intended objectives, which included supporting beneficiaries in the development of master plans and strategies and enabling the achievement of ex-ante conditionalities.

The **efficiency** of capacity building assignments, in terms of the administrative burden generated by JASPERS services, is assessed positively according to interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities. The ease of the cooperation with JASPERS emerged as one of the key advantages of the assistance received and the cost for beneficiaries is low, as no fee applies. The delivery of horizontal and strategy support services involves a trade-off between being responsive to the requests of the beneficiaries and ensuring efficiency in the use of internal resources. This service type ensures a great deal of flexibility for beneficiaries in terms of delivery by JASPERS, which is a key positive factor for national authorities who generally perceive the relation with JASPERS as an open channel: whenever a new need emerges within the project, JASPERS support is readily available.

JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support activities were **coherent** with the EU climate change, environmental and state aid approach and guidance. The services were also found to be coherent with other services and, internally, with other JASPERS services (e.g. technical advisory, IQR, and capacity building).

The **added value of capacity building** services derives from the coherence of training courses with EU requirements, extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements and experience across

countries. Compared to alternative schemes, the added value of the capacity building activities is that JASPERS can ensure a homogenous and consistent delivery across Member States. However, more standard technical training (CBA, state aid, etc.) can also be provided by specialised private-sector consultancies. The added value of JASPERS horizontal and strategy support lies in the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and prioritisation. Other comparable services are found in some analysed Member States that are able to provide similar assistance to the services offered by JASPERS.

### **Review services**

**Review services** have the overall objective of checking the compliance of ESIF major projects with EU rules and the maturity of projects submitted under Article 102.1 and Article 102.2 of the Common Provisions Regulation. They highlight issues that need to be resolved prior to the project being approved by the European Commission. Specifically, review services aim to provide the European Commission and managing authorities with an independent, consistent and timely review of ESIF major projects. In the current programming period, the uptake of PSA services has been more substantive as compared to IQR services. Over the period January 2014 to December 2018, a total of 118 PSA assignments were recorded as compared to 54 IQR assignments.

The evaluation finds that JASPERS review services are **relevant** in the current programming period in meeting the needs of the European Commission and national authorities in ensuring quality and compliance with EU requirements. In the current programming period, there was an overall preference for submission of projects under Article 102.2 with PSA, although some countries exclusively used Article 102.1 with IQR. This can be explained by the procedures around requests for payments and the lack of awareness of the advantages of the different review services. It is noted that a few Member States have exclusively submitted major projects through Article 102.1 with IQR. Experience also showed that involving JASPERS IQR at an early stage in the project preparation ensured a fast approval process.

The evaluation finds that the review services are **effective** in identifying issues with the project documentation and the maturity and sustainability of the projects in all their components. IQR services most often highlight issues of a non-critical nature as the majority of critical issues are resolved during the project preparation phase in exchanges between IQR and JASPERS advisory. PSA services often highlight issues related to the option analysis, project cost and demand analysis.

The evaluation finds that independent quality review services and post-submission appraisals were delivered within the foreseen deadlines (as applicable – 30 days for PSA and 180 days for IQR for assignments after the Omnibus Regulation). The introduction of the 180-day regulatory timeline for the delivery of IQR services after the Omnibus Regulation is found to have supported an increased standardisation of the duration of review services but also led to an increased duration of such services. Comparing the appraisal and approval process of major projects undergoing independent quality review (pre-submission appraisal) as compared to those undergoing post-submission appraisal revealed that projects submitted with pre-submission appraisal tend to have a longer timeline (by 77 days on average). This is explained by the shorter duration of post-submission appraisal services and the relatively low average duration of interruptions.

The **efficiency** of IQR services is found to benefit from JASPERS IQR's exchanges with managing authorities and JASPERS advisory. At the same time, a trade-off between efficiency and independence emerges. The efficiency of both IQR and PSA services is found to benefit from

precise procedures that, for example, clarify expected output and duration. In the current programming period IQR procedures did not initially provide precise indications for the delivery of JASPERS tasks, but this aspect has improved. The administrative burden associated with IQR services is widely perceived as low, but there are some shortcomings in reporting the time spent on preparing PSA reports after the first one raised doubts about the possibility of monitoring the use of resources. In addition, some instances of misalignment between JASPERS advisory and JASPERS IQR (the division in charge of PSA services) have led beneficiaries and managing authorities to perceive this as an unnecessary administrative burden. The evaluation also finds that one of the benefits of PSA services in terms of efficiency comes from the reduced workload and administrative burden on the part of the European Commission.

The evaluation finds that JASPERS review services are **coherent** with EU guidance, in spite of some inconsistencies with respect to PSA services. In many of the assignments analysed (72%), the interruption and observation letters from the European Commission picked up on the critical issues highlighted by the JASPERS IQR Division in the PSA reports and requested the beneficiaries and managing authorities to provide clarifications. However, some instances were found where projects were assessed positively by JASPERS review, but then interrupted by the European Commission.

The **EU added value** of review services (both IQR and PSA) lies with the technical expertise of the IQR function, which enables a consistent and standardised appraisal of major projects. The close dialogue with the European Commission services enables JASPERS to transfer knowledge between the European Commission and managing authorities and beneficiaries. Alternative schemes to JASPERS review services have not been identified, although some Member States have functions that check EU project compliance with national legislation.

### ***Planning, management, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services***

The evaluation also looked into the effectiveness and efficiency of the system of planning, management, monitoring and financing JASPERS services.

In terms of planning, the evaluation finds that steps have been taken by JASPERS to address shortcomings identified in the ECA special report concerning the use of Country Action Plans. As of June 2018, the process of Country Action Plans was revised incorporating a more systematic planning at assignment level (through assignment fiches). Although the operational effects of the new processes have yet to materialise, the new process envisages an increased involvement of Commission services in the planning, which is intended to improve strategic planning. The processes for planning in place prior to June 2018 are found to have had some limitations, i.e. Country Action Plans provided limited strategic planning and systematic planning at assignment level (through project fiches) was done only to a limited extent (only 28% of analysed assignments had project fiches). The ECA special report found a high proportion of administratively closed assignments and interpreted this as a shortcoming in the JASPERS planning processes. The current evaluation finds that 9% of all assignments were administratively closed but a slight downward trend can be observed in the past three years, which is interpreted to be an indicator of the adjustment of national authorities and JASPERS to the flexible process of planning.

In terms of management and monitoring, the evaluation finds that JASPERS processes are generally respected in the delivery of services. However, the evaluation finds that while JASPERS makes good use of internal processes for recording advice to beneficiaries, some could be further formalised. This is both in terms of advice provided by JASPERS to beneficiaries (as the evaluation finds that 64% of assignments analysed had guidance notes, whereas for the remaining 36% the

advice was provided through informal channels) as well as in terms of monitoring how advice is taken on board by beneficiaries. The evaluation also finds that while stakeholders are generally satisfied with the level of quality of JASPERS advice and expertise, issues were flagged in relation to the timeliness of inputs and deliverables.

The mechanism for financing JASPERS services relies on Specific Grant Agreements (SGA), concluded with the European Commission. SGAs are based on an ex-ante estimate of the demand for services under each mandate. So far, the actual expenditures have been lower than the budgets set out in the annual or multi-annual SGAs. Furthermore, the mechanism for financing JASPERS services does not include performance indicators or indication of outputs to be achieved linked with the level of financing, but payments are based on headcounts only. The evaluation finds that JASPERS may consider strengthening its internal resource planning and management system.

Based on the above, the evaluation presents a list of options for consideration for future action. These are included in chapter 8 of the evaluation.

## RÉSUMÉ ANALYTIQUE

Le présent rapport est le Rapport final de l'Évaluation à mi-parcours de l'initiative JASPERS en 2014–2020. Il comporte les principales conclusions de l'évaluation et se fonde sur des éléments factuels présentés dans le cadre du Premier rapport intérimaire (annexe A au présent rapport), du Second rapport intérimaire (rapport séparé), du Rapport sur la consultation ciblée en ligne (annexe D) et du **Rapport** du séminaire (annexe E).

### **Portée de l'étude**

L'évaluation à mi-parcours de l'initiative JASPERS initiative en 2014–2020 a pour objet d'évaluer la mise en œuvre de cette dernière. L'initiative Assistance conjointe à la préparation de projets dans les régions européennes (JASPERS) a été mise en place dans le but de fournir une assistance et des conseils techniques aux États membres de l'UE et aux pays IAP pour la gestion des financements de l'UE, ainsi que dans le cadre de la préparation et de la mise en œuvre de projets de haute qualité cofinancés par la Commission européenne. JASPERS fournit plusieurs types de services aux pays bénéficiaires, dont des services de conseil technique pour les grands projets ou les projets de moindre ampleur afférents aux Fonds ESI les projets MIE et les projets IAP, des services de renforcement des capacités et d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie dans le cadre des mandats des Fonds ESI et de l'IAP, ainsi que des services d'évaluation (évaluation indépendante de la qualité (EIQ) et évaluation après soumission (EAS)) dans le cadre du mandat des Fonds ESI.

L'évaluation est menée conformément aux dispositions de l'article 2, paragraphe 4, de l'Accord-cadre de partenariat concernant la gestion du dispositif d'assistance technique JASPERS 2014-2020 conclu entre la Banque européenne d'investissement (BEI) et la Commission européenne (CE). Elle se concentre sur la mise en œuvre de l'initiative JASPERS pendant la période de programmation 2014-2020.

### **Approche méthodologique**

L'évaluation à mi-parcours a été conçue conformément aux Lignes directrices pour une meilleure réglementation (Better Regulation Guidelines). Elle examine les résultats de JASPERS concernant l'ensemble des mandats particuliers (Fonds ESI, MIE, IAP) et tous les types d'activités (conseil technique, évaluation, renforcement des capacités et appui horizontal et à la stratégie) effectuées pendant la période de programmation 2014-2020. L'évaluation se fonde sur la Feuille de route d'évaluation et le cahier des charges de l'appel d'offres, sur la base des cinq critères d'évaluation suivants : pertinence, effectivité, efficacité, cohérence et valeur ajoutée de l'UE.

Elle comporte 5 tâches interdépendantes, à savoir : Tâche 1 (rapport méthodologique), Tâche 2 (évaluation des activités JASPERS pendant les années couvertes par la période janvier 2014-décembre 2018), Tâche 3 (évaluation approfondie de missions JASPERS choisies), Tâche 4 (activités de consultation) et Tâche 5 (rapport final avec des conclusions et des recommandations).

Les activités de collecte des données essentielles ont inclus : une analyse théorique de documents, une analyse de portefeuille de missions concernant l'ensemble des services JASPERS entre janvier 2014 et décembre 2018, une évaluation approfondie de 90 missions individuelles (sur la base d'une analyse théorique de plus de 400 documents, dont des fiches de projet, des notes concernant l'exécution d'actions, des fiches sur la valeur ajoutée et autres), ainsi que 101 entretiens avec des bénéficiaires, des autorités de gestion, des promoteurs de projets, des entretiens approfondis avec 14 représentants de la Commission européenne, des entretiens et des questionnaires avec des services JASPERS, 6 fiches-pays concernant les expériences nationales

avec JASPERS (dont des visites de terrain et des entretiens en personne avec des bénéficiaires et des autorités de gestion), une consultation ciblée en ligne ayant collecté 210 réponses et un séminaire des parties prenantes qui s'est tenu à Bruxelles le 19 septembre 2019, avec la participation d'environ 80 personnes.

Le mécanisme de financement des services JASPERS se fonde sur des conventions de subvention spécifiques (CSS) conclues avec la Commission européenne. Les CSS se fondent, quant à elles, sur une estimation ex ante de la demande de services dans le cadre de chaque mandat. Jusqu'à ce jour, les dépenses réelles ont été inférieures à celles budgétisées dans les CSS annuelles ou multi-annuelles pour l'ensemble des mandats autres que celui concernant l'instrument MIE (pour lequel une telle analyse ne s'avère pas possible sur la base des données disponibles). En outre, le mécanisme de financement des services JASPERS n'inclut pas d'indicateurs de performance ou d'indications sur les résultats à atteindre en rapport avec le niveau de financement. En effet, les paiements se fondent sur un remboursement des frais ex post équivalent temps plein (ETP). L'évaluation conclut que JASPERS pourrait envisager de renforcer sa planification des ressources et son système de gestion internes.

### **Services de conseil technique**

Les services de conseil technique constituent le type principal de services fournis par JASPERS. Ils représentent un pourcentage de 62 % (à savoir, 678) de l'ensemble des missions JASPERS sur la période analysée. Les services de conseil technique ont pour objet final d'assurer la préparation et l'approbation rapides des projets, avec un niveau de qualité élevé des projets et de la documentation y afférente. Les services de conseil technique aident les bénéficiaires et les autorités de gestion dans la planification et l'optimisation des grands projets ou des projets de moindre ampleur relevant des Fonds ESI, ainsi que des projets MIE et IAP.

Les services de conseil technique JASPERS ont été considérés comme étant pertinents pour répondre aux besoins des bénéficiaires, à savoir, en termes de secteurs prioritaires et de couverture géographique, ainsi qu'en termes d'axe de l'assistance fournie (c'est-à-dire, aide à la préparation des projets et de la documentation y afférente). Néanmoins, bien que l'utilisation (et la demande) des services de conseil pour les grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI s'avère élevée, le recours à ces services pour les projets IAP et MIE est modeste. Les principales raisons qui expliquent cette situation semblent être les différents niveaux d'exigences pour l'approbation des projets dans le cadre des différents mandats, ainsi que la faible sensibilisation au niveau des bénéficiaires concernant la possibilité d'obtenir une assistance JASPERS.

L'évaluation conclut à un tableau mitigé en ce qui concerne l'effectivité des services de conseil technique JASPERS pour contribuer au respect du calendrier et à la bonne qualité de l'exécution des projets à maturité. En ce qui concerne les grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI, l'évaluation conclut que ceux qui bénéficient de l'assistance JASPERS présentent un calendrier d'évaluation et d'approbation plus rapide que ceux n'ayant pas joui de ladite assistance (en moyenne, 85 jours de moins pour ceux ayant bénéficié de l'évaluation indépendante de la qualité et 15 jours de moins ceux ayant bénéficié de l'évaluation après soumission). D'une manière similaire, les interruptions des grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI assistés par JASPERS s'avèrent, généralement, plus courtes (34 jours) que celles des projets n'ayant pas bénéficié de l'assistance. Cet état de fait est interprété comme venant démontrer un effet positif sur le calendrier d'approbation des projets. Pour les projets de moindre ampleur relevant des Fonds ESI, ainsi que les projets MIE et IAP, en raison de limitations concernant la disponibilité de données sur les calendriers au niveau du portefeuille, nulle conclusion générale n'a pu être tirée. Les éléments factuels en provenance de l'analyse approfondie de l'échantillon de missions

et des entretiens concernant lesdits projets brossent un tableau divergent en ce qui concerne l'ampleur et l'orientation de l'effet des services de conseil technique sur les calendriers desdits projets.

Les services de conseil technique JASPERS pour les grands projets ou les projets de moindre ampleur relevant des Fonds ESI ainsi que les projets MIE et IAP ont été considérés comme étant exhaustifs et comme couvrant des questions variées, notamment les conseils concernant, par exemple, l'analyse des options (72 % des projets analysés), l'analyse de la demande (67 % des projets analysés) et l'aide à la demande de subvention pour les projets (62 % des projets analysés). L'évaluation conclut que JASPERS a eu un impact majeur sur l'amélioration du respect des règles de l'UE dans une large proportion des projets étudiés (86 % des cas analysés). En outre, l'évaluation conclut que les grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI ayant bénéficié de l'assistance JASPERS tendent à présenter moins d'interruptions et de problèmes critiques que ceux n'en ayant pas bénéficié, ce qui est interprété comme mettant en évidence un effet positif des services de conseil sur la qualité des projets. Néanmoins, les constatations concernant l'effet de JASPERS sur la conception, le champ d'application et les résultats des projets s'avèrent moins concluantes. Des éléments de preuve circonstanciels issus de l'analyse de l'échantillon de projets et de la consultation ciblée en ligne suggèrent que, dans certains cas, JASPERS a contribué à améliorer les projets en termes de conception et d'économie de coûts, mais une telle conclusion ne saurait être généralisée à l'ensemble du portefeuille de missions.

Enfin, l'évaluation a également évalué la préoccupation soulevée par le rapport spécial de la Cour des comptes européenne concernant un conflit d'intérêts potentiel entre les objectifs de JASPERS par le biais d'un compromis entre le « respect des délais » et la « qualité » des projets. Les constatations de l'évaluation ne pointent pas vers une conclusion claire. Néanmoins, des éléments de preuve circonstanciels tirés de cas particuliers pointent vers l'existence d'un compromis potentiel entre la qualité et le respect des délais généré par la décision des États membres de soumettre des demandes plus rapidement et d'obtenir la certification des dépenses.

En termes d'efficacité, les services de conseil technique JASPERS se caractérisent par une gestion axée sur la demande : la planification et la gestion des ressources sont guidées par les demandes des bénéficiaires. Le suivi du temps passé sur les missions individuelles a été introduit depuis février 2017, mais aucune indication précise n'est fournie ex ante concernant l'utilisation escomptée des ressources ou les produits livrables ou résultats à produire. Au niveau des projets, la coopération avec les bénéficiaires s'avère efficace, mais il existe peu d'éléments confirmant l'existence d'économies de coûts générés par JASPERS. L'analyse suggère que bien que les parties prenantes considèrent généralement que JASPERS génère souvent des économies de coûts, un tel effet s'avère moins évident lorsque l'on analyse les missions individuelles et l'on examine attentivement la nature des économies de coûts. Le seul aspect clair afférent à l'économie de coûts concerne l'évitement de procédures de passation de marchés fastidieuses pour accéder aux services JASPERS, par rapport aux alternatives possibles sur le marché.

Les conseils fournis dans le cadre des services de conseil JASPERS ont été considérés, dans l'ensemble, comme étant cohérents avec les orientations de l'UE. Néanmoins, certains cas de différences ont été identifiés entre les conseils fournis et les problèmes soulignés par la Commission européenne. En outre, les services de conseil et d'évaluation JASPERS ont été considérés comme étant cohérents sur le plan interne, bien que certains cas d'incohérences ou de différences dans les conclusions entre les services de conseil et les services d'évaluation aient été relevés. L'assistance de conseil technique JASPERS s'est avérée cohérente par rapport à d'autres dispositifs de conseil dont les projets ont également bénéficié. Néanmoins, le rôle double joué par JASPERS (aussi bien en tant que réviseur que conseiller) est perçu par les bénéficiaires comme complexe lorsque le conseil fourni par une division JASPERS diffère de celui fourni par une autre.

La valeur ajoutée de l'UE des services de conseil technique JASPERS résulte de son expertise et de son expérience méthodologiques et techniques pour l'ensemble des pays. Les services JASPERS sont flexibles et la valeur ajoutée apportée par le transfert de connaissances et de compétences par le biais aussi bien de l'approche pratique que de la fourniture de conseils s'avère précieuse pour les bénéficiaires. Bien que d'autres dispositifs de conseil et d'assistance techniques puissent fournir des services d'évaluation similaires, leur champ d'application et leur type (aussi bien thématique, sectoriel que géographique) diffèrent généralement de ceux de JASPERS, ainsi que le niveau d'expertise et de connaissances relatifs à l'UE desdits dispositifs. Il n'existe que quelques autres dispositifs qui fournissent des services similaires à ceux proposés par JASPERS (BEI-PASSA, EIAH), mais ceux-ci sont considérés comme venant compléter (fourniture de services à des stades différents) les services JASPERS, sans double-emploi. L'abandon progressif des conseils techniques JASPERS est considéré, aussi bien par les autorités de gestion que par les bénéficiaires, comme un risque pour la qualité des projets. Néanmoins, les représentants des États membres interviewés n'étaient pas certains de souhaiter payer pour les services de conseil JASPERS.

### ***Services de renforcement des capacités et d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie***

Les services de renforcement des capacités, qui ne représentaient que 5 % du portefeuille de missions, ont pour objet d'améliorer les compétences et les connaissances des administrateurs nationaux, et de contribuer à la préparation de projets d'investissement de bonne qualité par le biais d'une formation ciblée. L'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie, laquelle représentait 17 % du portefeuille de missions a pour objet, quant à elle, de fournir une assistance en amont dans la préparation de stratégies et de plans. Les missions ne sont pas spécifiques à des projets, mais souvent spécifiques à des secteurs. Elles concernent, par exemple, des stratégies des transports nationales, des plans de gestion des déchets, et des stratégies de développement urbain intégré.

Les services de renforcement des capacités et d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie ont été considérés, en général, comme étant pertinents et comme répondant aux besoins des bénéficiaires. Les informations rassemblées et la perception des parties prenantes montrent que les services de renforcement des capacités JASPERS s'avèrent largement pertinents pour répondre aux besoins des bénéficiaires. En outre (notamment dans les pays où les autorités nationales présentent des capacités relativement élevées), le renforcement pratique des capacités par le biais de missions de conseil technique et de formations ciblées (par exemple, axées sur un secteur) est reçu plus favorablement que les cours plus généraux de renforcement des capacités. Les services d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie sont considérés comme étant un outil pertinent pour répondre aux besoins des autorités nationales qui demandent de l'aide pour préparer des stratégies et définir des priorités parmi les projets. Néanmoins, il s'avère nécessaire de mieux planifier les missions d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie, comme indiqué par le pourcentage élevé de missions d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie administrativement closes (19 %).

Le renforcement des capacités et l'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie sont considérés comme étant effectifs pour générer les résultats et les produits escomptés. Fin 2018, 41 % des missions de renforcement des capacités et 41 % des missions d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie étaient toujours en cours. Les effets qui découlent de la mise en œuvre des missions de renforcement des capacités et d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie risquent fort d'être plus visibles à plus long terme, et moins à court terme. Néanmoins, l'évaluation conclut que les missions de renforcement des capacités organisées par JASPERS présentent un rayonnement important en termes de participants ciblés, couverture de sujets pertinents ainsi que développement et diffusion d'outils et de méthodes pour la préparation de projets. En outre, les activités de ren-

forcement des capacités sont considérées comme ayant donné lieu à un transfert de connaissances concernant, entre autres, l'analyse coût-bénéfice, la réglementation environnementale et celle sur le changement climatique, ce qui a permis d'améliorer les compétences dans les administrations publiques pour ce qui est du développement de projets d'investissement. Les missions d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie sont, elles aussi, considérées effectives pour atteindre des objectifs individuels en termes de développement de stratégies, préparation de programmes opérationnels, développement de lignes directrices et préparation de plans de planification et de plans directeurs. 83 % des missions d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie analysées ont été considérées comme effectives pour réaliser les objectifs escomptés, ce qui incluait assister les bénéficiaires dans le développement de plans directeurs et de stratégies ainsi que contribuer à la réalisation des conditionnalités ex ante.

L'efficacité des missions de renforcement des capacités, en termes de charge administrative générée par les services JASPERS, est évaluée comme positive, selon les entretiens avec les bénéficiaires et les autorités de gestion. L'un des principaux avantages de l'assistance reçue est le fait que la coopération avec JASPERS est aisée, avec un coût faible pour les bénéficiaires, puisqu'elle est fournie à titre gratuit. La fourniture de services d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie implique un compromis entre répondre favorablement aux demandes des bénéficiaires et assurer l'efficacité dans l'utilisation des ressources internes. Ce type de service garantit un degré de flexibilité élevé pour les bénéficiaires en termes de ce qui est fourni par JASPERS, ce qui constitue un facteur positif essentiel pour les autorités nationales, lesquelles perçoivent généralement que les courants de communication avec JASPERS sont bons : en cas d'apparition d'un nouveau besoin dans le cadre d'un projet, l'assistance JASPERS est rapidement disponible.

Les activités de renforcement des capacités et d'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie de JASPERS se sont avérées cohérentes avec l'approche et les orientations de l'UE en matière de changement climatique, d'environnement et d'aides étatiques. Les services ont également été considérés comme étant cohérents avec d'autres services et, sur le plan interne, avec d'autres services JASPERS (par exemple, le conseil technique, l'EIQ et le renforcement des capacités).

La valeur ajoutée des services de renforcement des capacités découle de la cohérence des cours de formation avec les exigences de l'UE, de la connaissance approfondie des exigences réglementaires de l'UE et de l'expérience concernant les différents pays. Par rapport à d'autres dispositifs, la valeur ajoutée des activités de renforcement des capacités réside dans le fait que JASPERS peut assurer une fourniture homogène et cohérente dans l'ensemble des États membres. Néanmoins, davantage de formations techniques standard (analyse coût-bénéfice, aides étatiques, etc.) pourraient également être fournies par des consultants spécialisés du secteur privé. La valeur ajoutée de l'assistance horizontale et à la stratégie JASPERS réside dans la phase en amont portant sur le développement stratégique, sur la définition du champ d'application et sur la définition des priorités. On trouve d'autres services comparables qui sont susceptibles de fournir une assistance similaire aux services proposés par JASPERS dans certains des États membres analysés.

### **Services d'évaluation**

Les services d'évaluation ont pour objet général de vérifier le respect par les grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI de la réglementation de l'UE, ainsi que la maturité des projets soumis dans le cadre des dispositions de l'article 102, paragraphe 1 et de l'article 102, paragraphe 2, du règlement portant dispositions communes. Ils mettent en avant les problèmes à résoudre avant qu'un projet ne puisse être approuvé par la Commission européenne. Plus spécifiquement, les services d'évaluation visent à fournir à la Commission européenne et aux autorités de gestion une

analyse indépendante, cohérente et ponctuelle des grands projets relevant des Fonds ESI. Lors de la période de programmation en cours, le recours aux services EAS s'est avéré plus important que celui aux services d'EIQ. Pendant la période allant de janvier 2014 à décembre 2018, un total de 118 missions EAS a été enregistré, contre 54 missions EIQ.

L'évaluation conclut que les services d'évaluation JASPERS se sont avérés pertinents lors de la période de programmation en cours pour répondre à la nécessité de la Commission européenne et des autorités nationales d'assurer la qualité et le respect des exigences de l'UE. Lors de la période de programmation en cours, on a constaté une préférence générale pour la soumission de projets dans le cadre de l'article 102, paragraphe 2 avec l'EAS, bien que certains pays n'aient utilisé que l'article 102, paragraphe 1 avec l'EIQ. Cet état de fait peut trouver son explication dans les procédures afférentes aux demandes de paiement et dans le manque de sensibilisation quant aux avantages des différents services d'évaluation. Il convient de noter qu'une poignée d'États membres ont soumis des projets exclusivement dans le cadre de l'article 102, paragraphe 1, avec l'EIQ. De même, l'expérience a montré que le fait d'impliquer l'EIQ JASPERS à un stade précoce de la préparation d'un projet assurait un processus d'approbation rapide.

L'évaluation conclut que les services d'évaluation s'avèrent effectifs pour identifier les problèmes affectant la documentation du projet ainsi que la maturité et la viabilité des projets en ce qui concerne l'ensemble de leurs composantes. Le plus souvent, les services d'EIQ mettent en avant des problèmes d'une nature non critique, dans la mesure où la plupart des problèmes critiques sont résolus pendant la phase de préparation du projet, dans le cadre d'échanges entre l'EIQ et les services de conseil JASPERS. Les services EAS soulignent souvent des problèmes afférents à l'analyse des options, au coût du projet et à l'analyse de la demande.

L'évaluation conclut que les services d'évaluation indépendante de la qualité et ceux d'évaluation après soumission ont été fournis dans les délais prévus (comme applicable – 30 jours pour les services EAS et 180 pour les services EIQ pour les missions, suite au règlement « omnibus »). Il est apparu que l'introduction du délai réglementaire de 180 jours pour la fourniture des services EIQ après l'adoption du règlement « omnibus » a contribué au renforcement de la standardisation de la durée des services d'évaluation, tout en rendant possible de prolonger leur durée. La comparaison des processus d'évaluation et d'approbation des grands projets ayant fait l'objet d'une évaluation indépendante de la qualité (évaluation avant soumission) à ceux ayant fait l'objet d'une évaluation après soumission a révélé que les projets présentés à la suite d'une évaluation avant soumission tendent à avoir un calendrier plus long (de 77 jours, en moyenne). Ceci s'explique par la durée plus courte des services d'évaluation après soumission et la durée relativement faible des interruptions, en moyenne.

L'efficacité des services d'EIQ est considérée comme ayant bénéficié des échanges de EIQ JASPERS avec les autorités de gestion et les services de conseil JASPERS. Dans le même temps, un compromis entre l'efficacité et l'indépendance apparaît. On estime que l'efficacité des services EIQ et EAS a bénéficié des procédures précises qui, par exemple, clarifient les résultats et la durée escomptés. Lors de la période de programmation en cours, les procédures EIQ ne fournissaient pas, initialement, d'indications précises pour la réalisation des tâches JASPERS, mais cet aspect s'est amélioré. La charge administrative associée aux services EIQ est largement perçue comme faible, mais il existe quelques lacunes dans l'indication du temps passé à préparer les rapports EAS suite aux premiers doutes soulevés par le premier de ces rapports concernant la possibilité de contrôler l'utilisation des ressources. En outre, certains cas de discordance entre les services de conseil JASPERS et EIQ JASPERS (la division en charge des services EIQ et EAS) ont amené les bénéficiaires et les autorités de gestion à percevoir qu'il s'agit là d'une charge administrative inutile. L'évaluation conclut également que l'un des avantages des services EAS en

termes d'efficacité découle de la réduction de la charge de travail et de la charge administrative de la part de la Commission européenne.

L'évaluation conclut que les services d'évaluation JASPERS s'avèrent cohérents avec les orientations de l'UE, en dépit de certaines incohérences en ce qui concerne les services EAS. Dans de nombreuses missions analysées (72 %), les lettres d'interruption et d'observations de la Commission européenne reprenaient les problèmes critiques soulignés par la division JASPERS EIQ dans les rapports EAS et demandaient aux bénéficiaires et aux autorités de gestion de fournir des éclaircissements. Néanmoins, il a été constaté que, dans certains cas, des projets avaient été évalués positivement dans le cadre de l'évaluation JASPERS, pour être interrompus ensuite par la Commission européenne.

La valeur ajoutée de l'UE des services d'évaluation (aussi bien EIQ que EAS) réside dans l'expertise technique de la division EIQ, qui permet une évaluation cohérente et standardisée des grands projets. Le dialogue étroit avec les services de la Commission européenne permet à JASPERS de transférer des connaissances entre la Commission européenne et les autorités de gestion et les bénéficiaires. Nous n'avons pas identifié l'existence de d'autres dispositifs semblables aux services d'évaluation JASPERS, bien que certains États membres disposent d'organes qui vérifient la conformité des projets UE à la législation nationale.

### ***Planification, gestion, suivi et financement des services JASPERS***

L'évaluation s'est également intéressée à l'efficacité et à l'efficacité du système de planification, gestion, suivi et financement des services JASPERS.

En termes de planification, l'évaluation conclut que JASPERS a adopté des mesures pour combler les lacunes identifiées dans le rapport spécial de la Cour des comptes européenne concernant l'utilisation des Plans d'action nationaux. Au mois de juin 2018, le processus des Plans d'action nationaux a été révisé, pour intégrer une planification plus systématique au niveau de l'attribution des missions (par le biais de fiches d'attribution). Bien que les effets opérationnels du nouveau processus ne se soient pas encore matérialisés, le nouveau processus envisage une implication accrue des services de la Commission dans la planification, ce qui devrait améliorer la planification stratégique. Les processus de planification en place avant juin 2018 ont été considérés comme ayant quelques limitations, à savoir, les Plans d'action nationaux prévoyaient une planification stratégique limitée, et la planification systématique au niveau de l'attribution des missions (par le biais de fiches d'attribution) n'était faite que dans une mesure restreinte (uniquement 28 % des missions analysées disposaient de fiches de projet). Le rapport spécial de la Cour des comptes européenne concluait à l'existence d'un taux élevé de missions administrativement closes, interprétant un tel état de fait comme une lacune dans les processus de planification JASPERS. La présente évaluation conclut que 9 % de l'ensemble des missions ont été administrativement closes, mais qu'une tendance légèrement à la baisse pouvait être observée au cours des trois dernières années, ce qui a été interprété comme indiquant un ajustement des autorités nationales et de JASPERS au processus de planification flexible.

En termes de gestion et de suivi, l'évaluation conclut que les processus JASPERS sont généralement respectés dans la fourniture des services. Néanmoins, l'évaluation conclut également que bien que JASPERS fasse bon usage des processus internes pour enregistrer les conseils fournis aux bénéficiaires, certains pourraient être formalisés davantage. Cela concerne aussi bien les conseils fournis par JASPERS aux bénéficiaires (l'évaluation constate que 73 % des missions analysées comportaient des notes d'orientation, alors que dans le 27% restant des cas, les conseils avaient été fournis par le biais de canaux informels) que le suivi de la façon dont les conseils sont

pris en compte par les bénéficiaires. L'évaluation conclut également qu'alors que les parties prenantes sont généralement satisfaites du niveau de qualité des conseils et de l'expertise JASPERS, des problèmes ont été signalés en ce qui concerne la ponctualité des résultats et des produits livrables.

Le mécanisme de financement des services JASPERS se fonde sur des conventions de subvention spécifiques (CSS) conclues avec la Commission européenne. Les CSS se fondent, quant à elles, sur une estimation ex ante de la demande de services dans le cadre de chaque mandat. Jusqu'à ce jour, les dépenses réelles se sont avérées inférieures à celles budgétisées dans les CSS annuelles ou multi-annuelles. En outre, le mécanisme de financement des services JASPERS n'inclut pas d'indicateurs de performance ou d'indication des résultats à atteindre en rapport avec le niveau de financement. Les paiements se fondent uniquement sur les effectifs. L'évaluation conclut que JASPERS pourrait envisager de renforcer sa planification des ressources et son système de gestion internes.

Au vu de ce qui précède, l'évaluation présente une liste d'options à prendre en considération afin d'adopter des mesures à l'avenir. Ces options sont contenues au chapitre 8 de l'évaluation.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Bericht bildet den [Abschlussbericht](#) zur [Halbzeitevaluierung der JASPERS-Initiative für den Zeitraum 2014–2020](#). Er enthält die wichtigsten Ergebnisse der Evaluierung und basiert auf den Daten des ersten Zwischenberichts (Anhang A dieses Berichts), des zweiten Zwischenberichts (gesonderter Bericht), des Berichts zur gezielten Online-Konsultation (Anhang D) und des Seminarberichts (Anhang E).

### **Gegenstand der Studie**

Das [Ziel der Halbzeitevaluierung der JASPERS-Initiative für den Zeitraum 2014–2020](#) ist es, die Umsetzung der JASPERS-Initiative zu bewerten. Die Initiative „[Gemeinsame Hilfe bei der Unterstützung von Projekten in europäischen Regionen](#)“ (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions - JASPERS) wurde ins Leben gerufen, um EU-Mitgliedstaaten und IPA-Länder durch fachliche Beratung bei der Verwaltung von EU-Mitteln und der Vorbereitung und Umsetzung von hochwertigen, die durch die Europäische Kommission kofinanziert werden, zu unterstützen. Die JASPERS-Initiative bietet den Empfängerländern eine Reihe von Diensten an. Dazu gehören die fachliche Beratung bei Großprojekten und regulären Projekten mit Förderung aus dem europäischen Struktur- und Investitionsfonds (ESI-Fonds) und Projekten, die aus der Fazilität „[Connecting Europe](#)“ (CEF) und dem Instrument für Heranführungshilfe (IPA) kofinanziert werden, Unterstützung beim Kapazitätsaufbau und bei übergreifenden und strategischen Fragen zum ESI-Fonds und IPA sowie Überprüfungsdienstleistungen (Unabhängige Qualitätsüberprüfung und Beurteilung von eingereichten Vorschlägen) im Rahmen des Mandats zum ESI-Fonds.

Die Evaluierung folgt den Vorgaben in Artikel 2.4 der „[Rahmen- und Partnerschaftsvereinbarung für die Verwaltung der Fazilität JASPERS für technische Hilfen 2014–2020](#)“ zwischen der Europäischen Investitionsbank (EIB) und der Europäischen Kommission und konzentriert sich auf die Umsetzung der JASPERS-Initiative im Programmzeitraum 2014–2020.

### **Methodologisches Konzept**

Diese Halbzeitevaluierung folgt den Leitlinien für bessere Rechtssetzung und überprüft die Kennzahlen der JASPER-Initiative für alle betroffenen Mandate (ESI-Fonds, CEF und IPA) und alle Aktivitäten (fachliche Beratung, Überprüfung sowie Kapazitätsaufbau und übergreifende und strategische Hilfe), die im Programmzeitraum 2014–2020 angeboten wurden. Dabei bezieht sich die Evaluierung insbesondere auf die fünf im Evaluierungsfahrplan und in der Leistungsbeschreibung genannten Kriterien: [Relevanz](#), [Wirksamkeit](#), [Effizienz](#), [Kohärenz](#) und [europäischer Mehrwert](#).

Die Evaluierung besteht aus fünf miteinander verbundenen Aufgaben: Aufgabe 1 (Methodologischer Bericht), Aufgabe 2 (Überprüfung der Aktivitäten im Rahmen der JASPERS-Initiative vom Januar 2014 bis Dezember 2018), Aufgabe 3 (Detaillierte Auswertung ausgewählter JASPERS-Aufträge), Aufgabe 4 (Beratertätigkeiten) und Aufgabe 5 (Abschlussbericht mit Fazit und Empfehlungen).

Die Daten für den Bericht wurden vor allem mit den folgenden Verfahren erhoben: Sekundäranalyse von Dokumenten, Portfolioanalyse zu allen JASPERS-Dienstleistungen zwischen Januar 2014 und Dezember 2018, detaillierte Auswertung von 90 Einzelaufträgen<sup>3</sup> (zu denen über 400 Projektdatenblätter, Fertigstellungsvermerke, Mehrwertblätter und andere Dokumente

<sup>3</sup> Da einige der untersuchten Aufträge mit anderen Aufträgen „verknüpft“ waren (z. B. fachliche Beratung verbunden mit der Begutachtung von eingereichten Anträgen (Post-Submission Appraisal, PSA) oder der unabhängigen Qualitätsprüfung (Independent Quality Review, IQR) und umgekehrt), wurden weitere 30 Aufträge analysiert, um ein umfassendes Bild der Unterstützung zu gewinnen, die JASPERS für ausgewählte Projekte erbracht hat.

analysiert wurden) 101 Interviews mit Mittelempfängern, Verwaltungsbehörden und Projektträgern, Tiefeninterviews mit 14 Vertretern der Europäischen Kommission, Befragung von JASPERS-Mitarbeitern in persönlichen Interviews und per Fragebogen, 6 Länderberichte zu den Erfahrungen mit JASPERS im jeweiligen Land, für die Mittelempfänger und Verwaltungsbehörden vor Ort persönlich befragt wurden, eine gezielte Online-Konsultation mit 210 Rückmeldungen und ein Seminar für betroffene Akteure am 19. September 2019 in Brüssel mit rund 80 Teilnehmern.

Der Mechanismus zur Finanzierung von JASPERS-Dienstleistungen erfolgt durch Spezifische Fördervereinbarungen (Specific Grant Agreements, SGA) mit der Europäischen Kommission. Die SGA basieren auf einer Ex-ante-Schätzung der im Rahmen der einzelnen Mandate benötigten Dienstleistungen. Bisher lagen die tatsächlichen Aufwendungen für alle Mandate niedriger als das Budget, das in den für jeweils ein Jahr oder mehrere Jahre geltenden SGA festgelegt wurde. Die einzige Ausnahme bildet die Fazilität „Connection Europe“, für die auf der Grundlage der verfügbaren Daten keine Analyse möglich ist. Außerdem hängt die Höhe der Finanzierung von JASPERS-Dienstleistungen nicht von vorgegebenen Leistungsindikatoren oder ergebnisbezogenen Indikatoren ab, sondern es werden nachträglich die aufgewendeten Vollzeitäquivalente (VZÄ) erstattet. Die Evaluierung zeigt, dass es bei der internen Ressourcenplanung und beim Management von JASPERS noch Verbesserungspotenzial gibt.

### **Fachliche Beratungsdienstleistungen**

Die **fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen** stellen mit einem Anteil von 62 % (678 Aufträge) den Hauptteil aller JASPERS-Aufträge im Untersuchungszeitraum dar. Das allgemeine Ziel der fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen ist die schnelle Vorbereitung und Genehmigung von Projekten bei gleichzeitiger Gewährleistung einer hohen Qualität beim Projekt selbst und dessen Dokumentation. Mit den fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen werden Mittelempfänger und Verwaltungsbehörden bei der Planung und Optimierung von Großprojekten und regulären Projekten mit Mitteln des ESI-Fonds sowie von CEF- und IPA-Projekten unterstützt.

Wie die Analyse zeigt, sind die fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen durch JASPERS **relevant** und entsprechen den Bedürfnissen der Mittelempfänger, sowohl was die unterstützten Sektoren und Länder angeht, als auch in Bezug auf den Beratungsschwerpunkt (Unterstützung bei der Vorbereitung von Projekten und der Projektdokumentation). Dabei wurden die Beratungsdienste bei Großprojekten für den ESI-Fonds zwar häufig in Anspruch genommen (und nachgefragt), bei IPA-Projekten und CEF-Projekten wurden dagegen nur selten fachliche Beratungsdienstleistungen genutzt. Dafür konnten zwei Gründe identifiziert werden. Zum einen gelten bei den verschiedenen Mandaten unterschiedliche Anforderungen für eine Projektgenehmigung und zum anderen wissen nur wenige Mittelempfänger, dass sie die Unterstützung der JASPERS-Initiative in Anspruch nehmen können.

Bei der Bewertung der **Wirksamkeit** der fachlichen Beratungsdienste von JASPERS, gemessen an der Einhaltung von Fristen und der Entwicklung ausgereifter, hochwertiger Projekte, ergibt die Evaluierung ein gemischtes Bild. Für Großprojekte des ESI-Fonds zeigt die Analyse, dass diese Projekte mit Unterstützung durch JASPERS schneller geprüft und genehmigt werden als Großprojekte ohne diese Hilfen (im Schnitt 85 Tage schneller mit unabhängiger Qualitätsprüfung und 15 Tage schneller mit Beurteilung des eingereichten Antrags). Auch sind Unterbrechungen bei Großprojekten des ESI-Fonds mit Unterstützung durch JASPERS im Schnitt kürzer (um 34 Tage) als bei anderen Projekten. Dies deutet darauf hin, dass sich die Unterstützung positiv auf den zeitlichen Ablauf genehmigter Projekte auswirkt. Da zu regulären Projekten des ESI-Fonds und zu CEF- und IPA-Projekten auf Portfolio-Ebene kaum Daten zu den zeitlichen Abläufen vorliegen, ist zu diesen Projekten keine allgemeine Einschätzung möglich. Die detaillierte Analyse einzelner Aufträge und die Interviews mit Projektbeteiligten ergeben ein widersprüchliches Bild,

wie stark und in welcher Weise sich die Beratungsdienstleistungen auf das Zeitmanagement dieser Projekte auswirken.

Gemäß der Untersuchung sind die fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen für Großprojekte und reguläre Projekte mit Mitteln des ESI-Fonds, CEF- und IPA-Projekte umfassend und thematisch breit gefächert. Besonders häufig erfolgt eine Beratung bei der Analyse der verfügbaren Optionen (72 % der untersuchten Projekte), der Nachfrageanalyse (67 % der untersuchten Projekte) und der Erstellung von Projektanträgen (62 % der untersuchten Projekte). Die Evaluierung zeigt, dass JASPERS bei einem Großteil der untersuchten Projekte (86 %) die Einhaltung von EU-Vorschriften stark verbessert. Für Großprojekte des ESI-Fonds ergibt die Evaluierung außerdem, dass bei Projekten mit JASPERS-Unterstützung tendenziell seltener Unterbrechungen und kritische Probleme auftreten als bei Projekten ohne diese Hilfen, was auf einen positiven Einfluss der Beratungsdienstleistungen auf die Qualität der Projekte hindeutet. Die Ergebnisse zu den Auswirkungen von JASPERS auf Design, Umfang und Ergebnis der Projekte sind dagegen weniger eindeutig. Indirekte Daten aus den detailliert analysierten Stichproben und der gezielten Online-Konsultation lassen darauf schließen, dass JASPERS in einigen Fällen dazu beigetragen hat, das Design von Projekten zu verbessern und dessen Kosten zu senken. Diese Ergebnisse lassen sich jedoch nicht auf das gesamte Auftragsportfolio verallgemeinern.

Schließlich wurden für die Evaluierung auch die in einem Sonderbericht des Europäischen Rechnungshofs genannte Kritik überprüft, dass bei den Zielvorgaben für JASPERS ein Konflikt zwischen den Zielen „fristgerechte Abwicklung“ und „Qualität“ der Projekte besteht. Die Ergebnisse der Evaluierung lassen hierzu keine eindeutige Schlussfolgerung zu. Allerdings lassen konkrete Fälle indirekt darauf schließen, dass tatsächlich zugunsten der Schnelligkeit manchmal Abstriche bei der Qualität gemacht werden, wenn Mitgliedstaaten besonders schnell Anträge einreichen und Ausgabenbescheinigungen beantragen wollen.

In Bezug auf die [Effizienz](#) sind die fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen bei JASPERS von einer nachfragegetriebenen Verwaltung geprägt: die Planung und Verwaltung von Ressourcen hängt von den Anforderungen der Mittelempfänger ab. Zwar wird seit Februar 2017 die für jeden Auftrag aufgewendete Arbeitszeit erfasst, es gibt aber keine Vorgaben, wie die Ressourcen eingesetzt werden sollen, oder welche Leistungen bereitgestellt oder Ergebnisse erzielt werden müssen. Auf Projektebene ist die Kooperation mit den Mittelempfängern effizient, allerdings liegen kaum Daten über die durch JASPERS erzielten Kosteneinsparungen vor. Wie die Analyse zeigt, sind die betroffenen Akteure zwar meist der Meinung, dass JASPERS häufig zur Kostenersparnis führt, dieser Effekt lässt sich jedoch kaum nachweisen, wenn man einzelne Aufträge analysiert und die Art der Kostenersparnis genauer überprüft. Die einzigen klaren Kosteneinsparungen entstehen, weil die JASPERS-Dienstleistungen, anders als auf dem freien Markt verfügbare Alternativen, ohne langwierige Ausschreibungsverfahren in Anspruch genommen werden können.

Grundsätzlich besteht eine [Kohärenz](#) zwischen den Beratungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS und den EU-Leitlinien. Es gab jedoch auch Fälle, in denen die Empfehlungen der Berater sich von den Punkten unterschieden, die von der Europäischen Kommission besonders betont werden. Auch zwischen den Beratungs- und den Überprüfungsleistungen von JASPERS besteht grundsätzlich eine interne Kohärenz. Dennoch gab es Fälle, in denen die fachliche Beratung und die Überprüfung zu leicht unterschiedlichen Ergebnissen kamen. Die fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS stimmten mit anderen Beratungsprogrammen überein, die von den Projekten genutzt wurden. Allerdings empfinden die Mittelempfänger die Doppelrolle von JASPERS (als Prüfer und Berater) dann als problematisch, wenn sich die Empfehlungen der einen JASPERS-Funktion von der einer anderen unterscheiden.

Der **europäische Mehrwert** der fachlichen Beratungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS ergibt sich aus ihrem methodologischen und technischen Fachwissen und den Erfahrungen aus vielen unterschiedlichen Ländern. Die Unterstützung durch JASPERS ist flexibel und die Vermittlung von Know-how und Fähigkeiten durch die praktische Arbeit und die Beratung ist für die Mittelempfänger sehr wertvoll. Zwar gibt es andere Programme, die Beratung, technische Hilfe und Prüfungsdienste anbieten, sie unterscheiden sich jedoch in Umfang und Struktur (thematisch, sektorbezogen und geografisch) von den JASPERS-Diensten und weisen auch weniger EU-Expertise und Erfahrung auf. Es gibt nur wenige Programme, die ähnliche Dienstleistungen anbieten (Project Advisory Support Service Agreement (PASSA) der EIB, EIAH), diese ergänzen die Dienstleistungen von JASPERS (Unterstützung in anderen Phasen) mehr als dass sie sich mit ihnen überschneiden. Die Beendigung der fachlichen Beratung durch JASPERS wird von den Verwaltungsbehörden und Mittelempfängern als Risiko für die Qualität der Projekte angesehen. Trotzdem waren sich die befragten Vertreter der Mitgliedstaaten nicht sicher, ob sie für die Beratung durch JASPERS tatsächlich zahlen würden.

### **Kapazitätsaufbau und übergreifende sowie strategische Hilfen**

Die Hilfen zum **Kapazitätsaufbau** machen nur 5 % des Auftragsportfolios aus und haben zum Ziel, durch zielgerichtete Weiterbildung die Kompetenzen und das Fachwissen der nationalen Behörden zu verbessern und die Entwicklung von hochwertigen Investitionsprojekten zu unterstützen. Die **übergreifende und strategische Hilfe**, die 17 % der Aufträge ausmacht, soll in einer vorgelagerten Stufe die Entwicklung von Strategien und Plänen unterstützen. Diese Aufträge sind nicht an konkrete Projekte gebunden, sondern meist sektorspezifisch und betreffen beispielsweise nationale Verkehrsstrategien, Abfallmanagementpläne und Strategien der integrierten Stadtentwicklung.

Nach Ansicht der befragten Akteure sind die Hilfen beim Kapazitätsaufbau und die übergreifenden und strategischen Hilfen grundsätzlich **relevant** und an die Bedürfnisse der Mittelempfänger angepasst. Die erhobenen Daten und die Befragung beteiligter Akteure zeigen, dass die Dienste zum Kapazitätsaufbau von JASPERS zum größten Teil den Bedürfnissen der Mittelempfänger entsprechen. Dabei ist die praktische Hilfe beim Kapazitätsaufbau durch fachliche Beratungsaufträge und zielgerichtete (z. B. auf einen bestimmten Sektor zugeschnittene) Schulungen beliebter als bei allgemeineren Kursen zum Kapazitätsaufbau (insbesondere in Ländern, in denen die Kapazität der Verwaltungsbehörden bereits recht hoch ist). Nationale Behörden, die um Unterstützung bei der Entwicklung von Strategien und der Auswahl von Projekten ersuchen, empfinden die übergreifenden und strategischen Hilfsangebote als relevante Instrumente, die ihren Bedürfnissen entsprechen. Allerdings wird ein relativ hoher Anteil der Aufträge im Bereich der übergreifenden und strategischen Hilfe (19 %) administrativ eingestellt, was zeigt, dass diese Auftragskategorie noch besser geplant werden muss.

Die Unterstützung beim Kapazitätsaufbau und die übergreifenden und strategischen Hilfen sind grundsätzlich **wirksam** und führen zu den erwarteten Ergebnissen und Leistungen. Ende 2018 waren 41 % der Aufträge zum Kapazitätsaufbau und 41 % der Aufträge zur übergreifenden und strategischen Unterstützung noch nicht abgeschlossen. Die Effekte durch die Umsetzung dieser Auftragskategorien werden daher vermutlich erst langfristig richtig deutlich werden, und lassen sich nach dieser kurzen Zeit nur schwer einschätzen. Allerdings zeigt die Evaluierung, dass die Aufträge, die von JASPERS im Bereich Kapazitätsaufbau durchgeführt werden, eine große Bandbreite von Teilnehmern erreichen, viele Themen abdecken und nützliche Instrumente und Methoden für die Projektvorbereitung entwickeln und verbreiten. Außerdem haben die Kapazitätsaufbau-Aufträge zu Wissenstransfer unter anderem zu den Themen Kosten-Nutzen-Analyse oder Rechtsvorschriften zum Umwelt- und Klimaschutz geführt und dadurch die Kompetenz der öffentlichen Verwaltungen zur Entwicklung von Investitionsprojekten verbessert.

Aufträge zur **übergreifenden und strategischen Unterstützung** erreichen meist ihre jeweiligen Zielvorgaben, z. B. die Entwicklung von Strategien, Erstellung von Arbeitsprogrammen, Entwicklung von Leitlinien oder Vorbereitung von Ablauf- und Gesamtkonzepten. 83 % der untersuchten übergreifenden und strategischen Unterstützungsaufträge haben ihre vorgegebenen Ziele erreicht, zu denen die Unterstützung der Mittelempfänger bei der Entwicklung von Gesamtkonzepten und Strategien und der Erreichung der geforderten Konditionalitäten gehörten.

Die **Effizienz** der Kapazitätsaufbau-Aufträge, gemessen am durch die JASPERS-Dienstleistungen entstehenden Verwaltungsaufwand, wurde von den befragten Mittelempfängern und Verwaltungsbehörden positiv beurteilt. Die reibungslose Kooperation mit JASPERS wurde als einer der größten Stärken der in Anspruch genommenen Unterstützung wahrgenommen, und die Kosten für die Mittelempfänger sind gering, weil die Hilfe kostenlos erfolgt. Bei der Umsetzung von Aufträgen zur übergreifenden und strategischen Unterstützung gab es einen Konflikt zwischen den Wünschen der Mittelempfänger und der effizienten Nutzung der internen Ressourcen. Diese Dienstleistungskategorie erlaubt den Mittelempfängern viel Flexibilität bei der Nutzung der JASPERS-Unterstützung. Dies ist für die nationalen Behörden, die ihre Beziehung mit JASPERS als offenen Kanal wahrnehmen, ein sehr positiver Faktor: wann immer beim Projekt ein Problem auftaucht, kann schnell Unterstützung durch JASPERS angefordert werden.

Die Tätigkeit von JASPERS in den Bereichen Kapazitätsaufbau und übergreifende und strategische Hilfe ist mit der Strategie und den Leitlinien der EU zu Klimawandel, Umweltschutz und staatlichen Beihilfen **kohärent**. Außerdem liegen sie auf einer Linie mit anderen Programmen und, intern, mit den anderen Aufgabenbereichen von JASPERS (fachliche Beratung, IQR und Kapazitätsaufbau).

Der **europäische Mehrwert der Hilfen zum Kapazitätsaufbau** besteht darin, dass die angebotenen Schulungen den EU-Vorgaben entsprechen und JASPERS über umfassendes Fachwissen zu den gesetzlichen Anforderungen der EU und Erfahrungen aus vielen unterschiedlichen Ländern verfügt. Im Vergleich zu anderen Programmen bieten die Angebote von JASPERS den Mehrwert einer einheitlichen Dienstleistung von gleichbleibender Qualität in allen Mitgliedstaaten. Allerdings gibt es auch spezialisierte Beratungsfirmen aus dem Privatsektor, die entsprechende fachliche Schulungen (Kosten-Nutzen-Analysen, staatliche Beihilfen etc.) anbieten. Der Mehrwert der übergreifenden und strategischen Hilfe durch JASPERS zeigt sich in den vorgelagerten Phasen der Strategieentwicklung, bei denen Umfang und Rangfolge einzelner Projekte bestimmt werden. Einige der untersuchten Mitgliedstaaten verfügen über vergleichbare Dienste, deren Dienstleistungen denen von JASPERS ähneln.

### **Überprüfungsdienstleistungen**

Das allgemeine Ziel der **Überprüfungsdienstleistungen** ist es zu prüfen, ob Großprojekte des ESI-Fonds dem EU-Recht entsprechen und die Projekte, die gemäß Artikel 102 Absatz 1 und 2 der Dachverordnung eingereicht werden, ausreichend ausgereift sind. Sie zeigen gegebenenfalls Probleme auf, die gelöst werden müssen, bevor das Projekt von der Europäischen Kommission genehmigt werden kann. Insbesondere dienen die Überprüfungsdienstleistungen dazu, der Europäischen Kommission und den Verwaltungsbehörden eine unabhängige, einheitliche und fristgerechte Überprüfung von Großprojekten des ESI-Fonds bereitzustellen. Im aktuellen Programmzeitraum wurde die Beurteilung eingereicherter Vorschläge (PSA) häufiger in Anspruch genommen als die unabhängige Qualitätsüberprüfung (IQR). Zwischen Januar 2014 und Dezember 2018 wurden insgesamt 118 PSA-Aufträge verzeichnet und nur 54 IQR-Aufträge.

Die Evaluierung zeigt, dass die Überprüfungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS im laufenden Programmzeitraum **relevant** waren, den Bedürfnissen der Europäischen Kommission und der nationalen Behörden entsprachen und gewährleisten konnten, dass die Projekte von guter

Qualität waren und die EU-Anforderungen erfüllten. Im laufenden Programmzeitraum wurde die Mehrzahl der Projekte gemäß Artikel 102 Absatz 2 mit PSA eingereicht, obwohl ein paar Länder ausschließlich das Verfahren nach Artikel 102 Absatz 1 mit IQR nutzten. Dies lässt sich durch die Verfahren zur Einreichung von Zahlungsanträgen erklären und dadurch, dass viele Akteure die Vor- und Nachteile der beiden Überprüfungsdienstleistungen nicht kennen. Es wurde festgestellt, dass ein paar Mitgliedstaaten Großprojekte ausschließlich im Verfahren nach Artikel 102 Absatz 1 mit IQR eingereicht haben. Erfahrungsgemäß beschleunigt es das Genehmigungsverfahren, wenn IQR-Leistungen von JASPERS bereits in eine frühe Phase der Projektvorbereitung integriert wurden.

Die Evaluierung zeigt, dass die Überprüfungsdienstleistungen **wirksam** sind und Probleme bei der Projektdokumentation und der Ausgereiftheit und Nachhaltigkeit der Projekte in allen Teilbereichen identifizieren können. IQR-Aufträge weisen meist auf nicht kritische Probleme hin, weil die meisten kritischen Probleme bereits während der Projektvorbereitung durch den Austausch zwischen dem IQR-Team und dem Beratungsteam von JASPERS gelöst werden. PSA-Aufträge weisen häufig auf Probleme bei der Analyse unterschiedlicher Optionen, den Projektkosten und der Nachfrageanalyse hin.

Die Evaluierung hat festgestellt, dass die unabhängigen Qualitätsüberprüfungen und die Beurteilung eingereichter Vorschläge innerhalb der vorgesehenen Fristen abgegeben wurden - 30 Tage für PSA und 180 Tage für IQR für Aufträge gemäß der Omnibus-Verordnung. Wie die Daten zeigen, hat die Einführung einer gesetzlichen Frist von 180 Tagen für die Abgabe von IQR durch die Omnibus-Verordnung dazu geführt, dass sich die Dauer dieser Überprüfungsaufträge zwar vereinheitlicht, gleichzeitig aber auch erhöht hat. Wenn man den Beurteilungs- und Genehmigungsprozesse von Großprojekten mit unabhängiger Qualitätsüberprüfung (Beurteilung vor der Einreichung) mit denen vergleicht, die erst nach der Einreichung überprüft werden, dauert der Prozess bei vorab beurteilten Projekten tendenziell länger (im Schnitt um 77 Tage). Die Gründe hierfür liegen in der kürzeren Dauer von Aufträgen zur Beurteilung eingereichter Vorschläge und den relativ kürzeren Unterbrechungen.

Der **Effizienz** der IQR-Aufträge kommt es zugute, dass sich die IQR-Teams von JASPERS stark mit den Verwaltungsbehörden und den Beratungsteams von JASPERS austauschen. Gleichzeitig besteht eine gewisse Spannung zwischen den Kriterien Effizienz und Unabhängigkeit. Außerdem wird die Effizienz der IQR- und PSA-Dienstleistungen dadurch gewährleistet, dass sie sehr präzisen Verfahren folgen, die beispielsweise die zu erbringende Leistung und die Fristen klar definieren. Im laufenden Programmzeitraum enthielten die IQR-Verfahren anfänglich keine präzisen Indikatoren für die im Rahmen der JASPERS-Aufträge zu erbringenden Leistungen. Dieser Aspekt hat sich aber seitdem verbessert. Nach Einschätzung der meisten Akteure ist der Verwaltungsaufwand bei den IQR-Dienstleistungen gering. Allerdings werden die Arbeitsstunden, die für die Erstellung von weiteren PSA-Berichten nach dem ersten Bericht nicht zuverlässig erfasst. Deshalb ist es zweifelhaft, ob die Nutzung der personellen Ressourcen korrekt überwacht werden kann. Außerdem gab es Fälle, in denen das Beratungsteam und das IQR-Team von JASPERS (die für PSA zuständige Abteilung) sich nicht ausreichend abgestimmt haben. Dies führt in der Wahrnehmung von Mittelempfängern und Verwaltungsbehörden zu einem unnötigen administrativen Mehraufwand. Die Evaluierung hat außerdem ergeben, dass die PSA-Dienstleistungen auch in dem Sinne effizient sind, dass sie die Arbeitsbelastung und den Verwaltungsaufwand bei der Europäischen Kommission reduzieren.

Gemäß der Evaluierung besteht trotz kleiner Unstimmigkeiten bei den PSA-Aufträgen grundsätzlich **Kohärenz** zwischen den Überprüfungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS und den Leitlinien der EU. Bei vielen der analysierten Aufträgen (72 %) bezogen sich die

Unterbrechungsschreiben und Kommentare der Europäischen Kommission auf die kritischen Problemen, auf die in den PSA-Berichten der IQR-Abteilung von JASPERS hingewiesen wurde. Daher wurden die Mittelempfänger und Verwaltungsbehörde um eine Klarstellung gebeten. Allerdings gab es auch ein paar Projekte, die bei der JASPERS-Überprüfung positiv beurteilt und dann von der Europäischen Kommission unterbrochen wurden.

Der **europäischen Mehrwert** der Überprüfungsdienstleistungen (IQR und PSA) besteht im technischen Fachwissen der IQR-Abteilung, das eine einheitliche und standardisierte Beurteilung von Großprojekten gewährleistet. Der enge Dialog mit den Dienststellen der Europäischen Kommission ermöglicht JASPER einen Wissenstransfer zwischen der Europäischen Kommission und den Verwaltungsbehörden und Mittelempfängern. Bei der Evaluierung wurden keine Programme identifiziert, die den Überprüfungsdienstleistungen von JASPERS entsprechen, wobei ein paar Mitgliedstaaten über Funktionen verfügen, die prüfen, ob EU-Projekte die nationalen Rechtsvorschriften erfüllen.

### ***Planung, Verwaltung, Überwachung und Finanzierung der JASPERS-Dienstleistungen***

Im Rahmen der Evaluierung wurde auch untersucht, ob die JASPERS-Dienstleistungen wirksam und effizient geplant, verwaltet, überwacht und finanziert werden.

Was die Planung betrifft, zeigt die Evaluierung, dass JASPERS bereits Maßnahmen getroffen hat, um die im Sonderbericht des Europäischen Rechnungshofs (EuRH) in Bezug auf die Verwendung Nationaler Aktionspläne identifizierten Mängel zu beseitigen. Seit Juni 2018 gilt für die Nationalen Aktionspläne ein überarbeitetes Verfahren, das eine systematischere Planung der einzelnen Aufträge beinhaltet (mittels Auftragsblättern). Obwohl sich die operativen Effekte der neuen Verfahren erst noch zeigen müssen, sehen diese vor, dass die Dienststellen der Kommission stärker am Planungsprozess beteiligen werden, wodurch eine bessere strategische Planung erreicht werden soll. Der Evaluierung zufolge hatte der bis Juni 2018 angewandte Planungsprozess gewisse Schwächen. Konkret boten die Nationalen Aktionspläne zu wenig strategische Planung und auf Ebene der einzelnen Aufträge erfolgt kaum eine systematische Planung (mit Hilfe von Projektblättern) (nur 28 % der analysierten Aufträge hatten Projektblätter). Der EuRH stellte in seinem Sonderbericht fest, dass relativ viele Projekte administrativ beendet wurden und deutet dies als Defizit bei der Planung von JASPER-Dienstleistungen. Gemäß der vorliegenden Evaluierung wurden 9 % aller Aufträge administrativ beendet, wobei in den letzten drei Jahren ein leichter Abwärtstrend zu erkennen ist, der darauf hinweist, dass sich die nationalen Behörden und JASPERS besser auf den flexiblen Planungsprozess eingestellt haben.

In Bezug auf die Verwaltung und Überwachung hat die Evaluierung gezeigt, dass die Verfahren im Rahmen von JASPERS grundsätzlich gute Ergebnisse erzielen. Allerdings wurde festgestellt, dass JASPERS seine internen Abläufe zur Dokumentation der Beratungsleistungen für die Mittelempfänger zwar angemessen nutzt, manche Verfahren aber weiter formalisiert werden könnten. Dies gilt sowohl für die Beratungsdienstleistungen, die JASPERS für die Mittelempfänger erbringt (gemäß der Evaluierung erstellten 73 % der untersuchten Aufträge schriftliche Empfehlungen, wogegen 27 % der Empfehlungen über informelle Kanäle übermittelt wurden) als auch für die Nachverfolgung, wie die Empfehlungen von den Mittelempfängern umgesetzt werden. Die Evaluierung hat auch gezeigt, dass die beteiligten Akteure grundsätzlich mit der Qualität der Beratung und fachlichen Unterstützung durch JASPERS zufrieden waren. Allerdings gab es kleinere Kritikpunkte in Bezug auf die fristgerechte Bereitstellung von Daten und Ergebnissen.

Der Mechanismus zur Finanzierung von JASPERS-Dienstleistungen erfolgt durch Spezifische Fördervereinbarungen (Specific Grant Agreements, SGA) mit der Europäischen Kommission. Die

SGA basieren auf einer Ex-ante-Schätzung der im Rahmen der einzelnen Mandate benötigten Dienstleistungen. Bisher lagen die tatsächlichen Aufwendungen für alle Mandate niedriger als das Budget, das in den für jeweils ein Jahr oder mehrere Jahre geltenden SGA festgelegt wurde. Außerdem hängt die Höhe der Finanzierung von JASPERS-Dienstleistungen nicht von vorgegebenen Leistungsindikatoren oder ergebnisbezogenen Indikatoren ab. Die Zahlungen erfolgen auf Basis der Mitarbeiter. Die Evaluierung zeigt, dass es bei der internen Ressourcenplanung und beim Management von JASPERS noch Verbesserungspotenzial gibt.

Auf der Grundlage der oben genannten Ergebnisse, stellt die Evaluierung eine Liste von Optionen für künftige Maßnahmen vor. Diese sind in Kapitel 8 des Evaluierungsberichts enthalten.

## ABBREVIATION LIST

<b>ACN</b>	Action Completion Note
<b>CBA</b>	Cost-Benefit Analysis
<b>CEF</b>	Connecting Europe Facility
<b>CF</b>	Cohesion Fund
<b>CPR</b>	Common Provisions Regulation
<b>DG CLIMA</b>	Directorate-General for Climate Action
<b>DG COMP</b>	Directorate-General for Competition
<b>DG ENV</b>	Directorate-General for Environment
<b>DG MOVE</b>	Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport
<b>DG NEAR</b>	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
<b>DG REGIO</b>	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>ECA</b>	European Court of Auditors
<b>EFSD</b>	European Fund for Strategic Investments
<b>EIA</b>	Environmental Impact Assessment
<b>EIAH</b>	European Investment Advisory Hub
<b>EIB</b>	European Investment Bank
<b>EIB-PASSA</b>	European Investment Bank Project Advisory Support Service Agreement
<b>EIB-PASU</b>	European Investment Bank Project Advisory Support Unit
<b>EIPA</b>	European Institute of Public Administration
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESIF</b>	European Structural and Investment Funds
<b>ESW</b>	Energy and Solid Waste
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAFA</b>	Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement 2014-2020
<b>FPA</b>	Framework Partnership Agreement
<b>IAS</b>	Internal Audit Service
<b>INEA</b>	Innovation and Networks Executive Agency
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
<b>IQR</b>	Independent Quality Review
<b>JASPERS</b>	Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions
<b>KfW</b>	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
<b>MFF</b>	Multiannual Financial Framework
<b>MP</b>	Major project
<b>NCC</b>	Networking and Competence Centre
<b>PDR</b>	Project Development Report
<b>PSA</b>	Post-Submission Appraisal
<b>R&amp;D</b>	Research and Development

<b>RAM</b>	Rail, Air and Maritime
<b>RMF</b>	Result Measurement Framework
<b>ROD</b>	Roads
<b>SD</b>	Smart Development
<b>SEA</b>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<b>SFC2014</b>	Shared Fund Management Common System 2014-2020
<b>SGAs</b>	Specific Grant Agreements
<b>SRSS</b>	Structural Reform Support Service
<b>WAW</b>	Water and Wastewater
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WBIF</b>	Western Balkan Investment Framework
<b>WWTP</b>	Wastewater Treatment Plant

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Article 102.1 with independent quality review	A procedure for notification of ESIF projects to the European Commission stipulated in Article 102.1 of the Regulation No 1303/2013 whereby the managing authority notifies the ESIF major project to the independent quality review function of JASPERS for appraisal. Upon completion of the appraisal and once a positive independent quality report is issued by JASPERS, the project is notified to the European Commission together with the relevant documentation as per the requirements of Article 102.1 of the Regulation No 1303/2013.
Article 102.2 with post-submission appraisal	A procedure for submission of ESIF major projects to the European Commission stipulated in Article 102.2 of the Regulation No 1303/2013 whereby the major project is submitted by the managing authority to the European Commission directly. The European Commission then makes a formal request for post-submission appraisal to JASPERS. Upon completion of post-submission appraisal, the European Commission takes a decision on the major project, which can be to adopt, reject or interrupt the project. In cases of interruptions, the project is sent back to the managing authority for revisions.
Assignment Fiches	A standard document developed by JASPERS and used for the purpose of planning advisory assignments and containing information concerning the assignment including the country, sector, the coordinating body and beneficiary, the objectives and scope of the assignment, the timeline for JASPERS intervention, the outputs and deliverables. Furthermore, the document includes project details such as project objectives and description, status and timing, costs and financing plan. The template for the assignment fiches has been in force since 29.06.2018.
Project Fiches	A standard document developed by JASPERS and used for the purpose of planning advisory assignments and containing information concerning the assignment including the country, sector, coordinating body and project promoter, description of the project and objectives, status and timing, project costs and financing plan. Furthermore the, document includes the objectives and scope of the JASPERS input, timing, output, expertise needed, JASPERS resources needed, results of JASPERS input. Project fiches were in force prior to 29.06.2018.
Country Action Plans	A formal document required for the 2014–2020 programming period prior to starting collaboration between JASPERS and beneficiary countries. The document consists of the working arrangements (standard across all countries) and includes a preliminary list of projects or areas of support. Country Action Plans are accompanied by a cover letter signed by the Head of JASPERS and the Country Relationship Officer. Once the document is signed by the national authorities it becomes a rolling action plan. Subsequent requests for support are added on a rolling basis and the status on the assignments is updated regularly.
JASPERS Quality Manual	A document providing a detailed description of the JASPERS Quality Management approach and detailing procedures, policies and roles. The document contains information about the JASPERS structure, mission and values, strategy, processes governance, processes related to all services. The Quality Manual replaced the JASPERS Procedures Manual v1.0 dated November 2010. The Quality Manual has been revised four times, i.e. v 1.0 (06/02/2016), v.1.1 (07/11/2017), v.1.2 (28/05/2018), v.1.3 (29/06/2018), v.1.4 (06/06/2019) to update amongst others the IQR processes, the strategy map, assignment creation processes.

Completeness check	A formal activity done by the JASPERS IQR Division under the Independent Quality Review services to verify the completeness of the project files received for appraisal with reference to the set of documents indicated in working arrangements signed with the Member State.
First assessment	A formal activity done by the JASPERS IQR Division under the Independent Quality Review services once the completeness check is finalised to identify any outstanding issues that need to be addressed with the ESIF major project application.
Action Completion Notes	A standard document developed by JASPERS advisory upon completion of a technical advisory assignment for ESIF major, ESIF non-major, and IPA projects. The document contains the conclusions of the assessments made by JASPERS advisory and recommendations to the authorities.
Project Development Reports	A standard document developed by JASPERS advisory upon completion of a technical advisory assignment for CEF projects. The document contains the conclusions of the assessments made by JASPERS advisory and recommendations to the authorities.
Action Closure Document	A standard document developed by JASPERS advisory upon administrative closure of an assignment.
Interruption Letter	A document developed by the European Commission containing the reasons for interruption of an ESIF major project that is submitted by the managing authority under Article 102.2 of Regulation No 1303/2013.
Independent Quality Review Report	A standard document developed by JASPERS IQR Division upon completion of an appraisal of an ESIF major project application according to the requirements of Article 23(2)(b) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 and the quality review criteria set out in Annex II of the same Regulation.
Feedback Form/Report	A standard document developed by the national authorities or beneficiaries once an assignment is completed providing feedback concerning the support provided by JASPERS.
Value Added Fiche	A standard document developed by JASPERS upon completion of an assignment reporting a self-assessment of the value added during the assignment.
Post-Submission Appraisal Report	A standard document developed by JASPERS IQR Division upon completion of an appraisal of an ESIF major project application in line with the information required for the approval of the major project in Article 101 of the Regulation No 1303/2013 and considering issues listed in Annex II of the Regulation No 480/2014 and Regulation EU No 207/2015 in relation to the Cost-Benefit Analysis and Application Form. The scope of the PSA report does not include: project admissibility verification (checking completeness of the dossier), ex-ante conditionality and policy compliance with the priority axis including the project's contribution to the relevant specific objectives in the Operational Programme, verification of compliance with environmental protection requirements, and state aid aspects of the project.
Phased project	Major projects from the previous programming period that have been shifted into the 2014–2020 programming period.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The present report constitutes the **Draft Final Report** of the **Mid-term evaluation of the JASPERS initiative in 2014-2020**. The Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) is a technical assistance partnership set up by the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to support EU regions in absorbing EU funds through the development of mature projects.

### 1.1 *Objective and scope of the study*

The **objective** of the mid-term evaluation of the JASPERS initiative in 2014–2020 is to assess the implementation of the JASPERS initiative as well as its performance in view of assessing the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence** and **EU added value** of the initiative. The evaluation is done in line with Article 2.4 of the 'Framework and Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014-2020' between the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Commission (EC) and the requirements of the **Better Regulation Guidelines**. The evaluation assesses the performance of JASPERS across all specific mandates (ESIF, CEF and IPA) and types of services (advisory, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support and review) in the programming period 2014–2020. The evaluation also seeks to identify good practices and challenges in relation to the delivery of JASPERS services and to provide recommendations for the remaining years of the current arrangements, as well as for the role of JASPERS in the future programming period.

In the previous programming period JASPERS was subject to an in-depth evaluation covering the period 2007–2013<sup>4</sup> conducted in 2012. In the current programming period, the JASPERS initiative performance was assessed in a **special report** conducted by the **European Court of Auditors (ECA)**<sup>5</sup> and an **audit report** performed by the **Internal Audit Service of the European Commission**. The findings of the previous studies are used throughout this evaluation and presented in section 3.7.

### 1.2 *Scope and structure of the current report*

This final report is structured as follows: **chapter 2** provides an overview of the methodological approach to the evaluation, **chapter 3** sets out the context and background of JASPERS, **chapter 4** presents the evaluation findings per type of service, and **chapter 5** outlines the conclusions and recommendation resulting from the evaluation. The report also contains several appendices including **Appendix A** on the institutional analysis of JASPERS, **Appendix B** on the portfolio analysis, **Appendix C** on cost savings, **Appendix D** on online consultation and **Appendix E** on the seminar.

<sup>4</sup> AECOM (2012), JASPERS Evaluation Final Report, conducted for the European Commission, DG REGIO.

<sup>5</sup> European Court of Auditors (2018), Special Report JASPERS – time for better targeting, no. 01/2018.

## 2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter presents the methodological approach underpinning this evaluation. The approach has been continuously fine-tuned throughout the evaluation. The section contains an overview of the key evaluation criteria and questions (see section 2.1), an overview of evaluation tasks and data collection activities (see section 2.2) and a presentation of the key limitations and reflections on the robustness of the findings presented in the evaluation (see section 2.3).

### 2.1 Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation was designed in line with the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines<sup>6</sup> and built on the Evaluation Roadmap<sup>7</sup> and the tender specifications, based on five evaluation criteria: **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and EU added value**. Evaluation criteria were translated into specific evaluation questions provided in the tender specifications and further developed by the evaluation team. The list of questions is presented at the end of the section (see Table 2-1). In order to address each evaluation question, a detailed methodological design for the evaluation was developed and presented in the Methodological Report which was drawn up as part of Task 1 (as explained in section 2.2 below).

The subject of the evaluation (JASPERS) is a continuously moving and developing target as changes to the applicable processes and the delivery of services have taken place as recently as end 2019, thus, towards the end of the period covered by this evaluation (January 2014–December 2018). Against this background, the evaluation findings presented in this report as far as possible cover the developments related to new processes while acknowledging that the real results in terms of the effects, efficiency and relevance of the new processes will be only visible in the longer term.

**Relevance** assesses in the context of this evaluation the extent to which JASPERS services can be perceived as adequate tools to improve the quality of preparation of projects (EQ 1) and the extent to which the services respond to the key needs of JASPERS 'clients' (both the European Commission and national stakeholders) (EQ 2 and 3). This is done at portfolio and assignment level (through a selection of assignments that were analysed in-depth), at country level (through a selection of country fiches) and at portfolio level. Throughout the evaluation, the focus is on assessing the evolution of needs for JASPERS services.

**Effectiveness** focuses on two dimensions, i.e. the organisational effectiveness of JASPERS (EQ 4) and the effectiveness of JASPERS services in terms of generating intended results and effects (EQ 5, EQ 6, EQ 7, EQ 8, EQ 9, EQ 10, EQ 11).

First, the evaluation addresses the effectiveness of the *administrative set-up* (EQ 4) which assessed the extent to which the processes related to planning, management and monitoring of JASPERS services have been effective.

Second, the evaluation addresses the effectiveness of the various types of JASPERS services provided (technical advisory support to ESIF major projects, ESIF non-major, CEF projects and IPA projects; review services for ESIF major projects, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support). The evaluation assesses the extent to which the JASPERS services have contributed to the achievement of JASPERS' objective of ensuring the development of good quality

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2017), Better Regulation Guidelines. See:

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/better-regulation-guidelines.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Evaluation Roadmap, Mid-term evaluation of the JASPERS initiative in 2014–2020, See:

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1249-Mid-term-evaluation-of-the-JASPERS-initiative-in-2014-2020>

and mature projects that are swiftly approved (EQ 5, EQ 6, EQ 7, EQ 8, EQ 9) and in terms of the objective of supporting the administrative capacity of managing authorities and beneficiaries (EQ 10, EQ 11) (see intervention logic in section 3.4).

The evaluation assesses both the direct and indirect effects arising from technical advisory services to ESIF, CEF, IPA projects and review services for ESIF major projects. In terms of direct effects, the evaluation addresses the effect that technical advisory services to ESIF, CEF, IPA projects and review services for ESIF major projects have on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of projects (EQ 6). Furthermore, the evaluation assesses the effect of technical advisory services on ESIF, CEF, IPA projects in terms of improving the quality of documentation (EQ 7) and the quality of the projects (EQ 9), the latter being measured in terms of changes arising from the JASPERS support in the scope, design, compliance with EU rules and costs of the projects. The evaluation also assesses the extent to which review services for ESIF major projects are effective in highlighting issues (critical issues) with projects (EQ 5). Drawing on the results of the previous ECA study, the evaluation finally assesses the extent to which a trade-off is present and perceived between the two core objectives of JASPERS services – i.e. improving the timeline of the projects while at the same time improving the quality (EQ 8). In terms of indirect effects, the hands-on approach of JASPERS towards providing advisory services is also expected to have an indirect effect on improving the technical and administrative capacity of supported authorities, which the evaluation also assesses (EQ 10).

The evaluation also assesses the effects of capacity building on the administrative capacity of beneficiaries (EQ 11) and the effect of horizontal and strategy support on the development of strategies and setting overarching policy objectives (EQ 10). Measuring the effect of JASPERS capacity-building services on the beneficiaries has certain limitations since such effects are only visible after a longer period (e.g. when the beneficiaries develop projects with the knowledge accumulated through such capacity-building activities) and because the ability to develop beneficiaries' projects may be affected by other exogenous factors (e.g. whether they also received technical advisory support on specific projects from JASPERS or other capacity-building activities, and the a priori capacity of beneficiaries).

**Efficiency** considers the relationship between the resources used by an intervention (the costs) and the changes generated by the intervention (which may be positive or negative)<sup>8</sup>. The analysis of efficiency assesses the extent to which JASPERS services have been provided in a cost-efficient manner by looking, first, at the overall planning and management mechanisms that JASPERS has in place with regard to financial resources, human resources and time resources (EQ 12), then at the assessment of the efficiency of each individual service type, including the extent to which they have generated benefits in terms of cost savings (EQ 13)<sup>9</sup>. The attempt to quantify the costs of JASPERS services at assignment level and compare them with alternative schemes was hampered by data limitations. Thus, the use of resources is addressed mainly in qualitative terms by looking at the procedure and logic underpinning their planning and management. The comparison with alternative schemes is done mainly under the added value criterion. In terms of benefits, focus is put on cost savings generated by JASPERS services (specifically regarding advisory support). The analysis relies both on data received from JASPERS as well as in-depth analysis of a sample of assignments to ascertain whether cost savings were generated by JASPERS. The evolving methodology for identifying and tracking cost savings generated at project level prevented a more conclusive finding on cost savings.

<sup>8</sup> Better Regulation Guidelines, European Commission, SWD (2017) 350, p.60.

<sup>9</sup> Lack of data on JASPERS alternatives hampers the possibility of addressing EQ 14.

**Coherence** focuses on assessing the external and internal coherence of JASPERS services. It does so by looking at the extent to which JASPERS services are coherent with EU policies, specifically by assessing whether JASPERS delivers results in coherence with the objectives of policies other than those relating to cohesion, transport and enlargement, for example with the EU approach to climate change, environment and state aid (EQ 16). The other aspect of external coherence is assessing the extent to which the guidance given by JASPERS is coherent with the European Commission's guidance (EQ 18). Furthermore, the evaluation explores the extent to which JASPERS interventions are coherent with other advisory services available to beneficiaries at European or national level (EQ 17). An additional aspect examined was internal coherence, i.e., an assessment of the level to which the different JASPERS services were coherent.

Coherence with EU objectives was assessed on the basis of assignments where JASPERS services were inconsistent with EU requirements (climate change, environment and state aid and where relevant, EU guidance in other aspects), while coherence with EU guidance examined the alignment between JASPERS and EC guidance. The coherence of JASPERS with other services was assessed by identifying overlaps in assignments between JASPERS and other services as well as instances of inconsistency between JASPERS and other services. The analysis relies on the in-depth analysis of sample assignments and desk research.

**EU added value** assesses the extent to which JASPERS services bring added value as compared to actions undertaken at national or international level (EQ 19) and the consequences of phasing out or reducing JASPERS services (EQ 20, EQ 21). This also includes possible alternative providers of technical assistance services (e.g. private consultancies, other EIB advisory services, World Bank, SRSS). EU added value from JASPERS advisory services is assessed according to seven dimensions: a) technical expertise; b) methodological expertise; c) smooth application process; d) expertise in preparing EU projects; e) knowledge of national context; f) Experience across countries and G) flexibility in adapting to needs. Data comes primarily from interviews with stakeholders (managing authorities and beneficiaries) in connection with the 90 sample assignments, country fiches, online consultations and the seminar.

Table 2-1 Overview of evaluation questions

#### RELEVANCE

- EQ 1: To what extent can JASPERS be considered as a relevant tool to improve quality of preparation and implementation of projects, in particular major projects?
- EQ 2: To what extent is JASPERS responding to Member States' needs?
- EQ 3: To what extent is JASPERS responding to the Commission's requirements?

#### EFFECTIVENESS

- EQ 4: Is the current JASPERS' administrative set-up effective?
- EQ 5: How often is the Commission highlighting new critical issues during the appraisal process which had not been previously addressed by JASPERS advice?
- EQ 6: What is JASPERS effect on the timeliness of preparation, approval and implementation (if possible at this stage) of projects comparing to non-assisted projects as well as comparing between the different procedures for approval (notification, submission, CEF)?
- EQ 7: What is JASPERS effect on the quality of projects' documentation submitted for approval, i.e. the effect of JASPERS' intervention on fulfilling formal requirements set for projects' documentation?
- EQ 8: How does JASPERS address the "time versus quality" dilemma, i.e. how JASPERS ensures satisfactory balance between achieving its two main aims, namely the quality and the timeliness?
- EQ 9: To what extent can changes in the quality of projects be credited to JASPERS, i.e. what is the real JASPERS effect on the scope of the project, its' outputs, results, costs or compliance with EU rules in terms of CBA, state aid, climate or environment?
- EQ 10: To what extent do JASPERS activities have effect on setting strategic policy objectives in the beneficiary countries?

- EQ 11: To what extent do JASPERS interventions strengthen the administrative capacity of the beneficiaries, at the level of individual projects and broader, at the level of designing policy objectives and addressing structural problems?

#### EFFICIENCY<sup>10</sup>

- EQ 12: Do the current arrangements (including the system of planning and managing assignments) involving JASPERS' cooperation with the Member States and with all the relevant Commission services allow for the efficient use of financial and human resources at all levels, i.e. JASPERS, Commission, national authorities?
- EQ 13: To what extent is JASPERS efficient on the project level, i.e. to what extent were JASPERS costs proportionate compared to the level of savings on project costs generated as a result of JASPERS assignments?<sup>11</sup>

#### COHERENCE

- EQ 16: Does JASPERS deliver results in coherence with the objectives of other than Cohesion, Transport and Enlargement policies, for ex. with EU approach to climate change, environment and state aid?
- EQ 17: To what extent are JASPERS interventions coherent (i.e. coordinated, complementary, looking for synergies and avoiding duplications) with other advisory services available to beneficiaries at European or national level?
- EQ 18: To what extent is the guidance given by JASPERS coherent (i.e. coordinated, complementary, looking for synergies and avoiding duplications) with Commission's guidance?

#### EU ADDED VALUE

- EQ 19: What is the added value stemming from JASPERS initiative compared to actions undertaken at the national and/or regional level to improve the quality of implementation, and can JASPERS be easily substituted by these initiatives?
- EQ 20: What would be the potential consequences of phasing out the JASPERS initiative?
- EQ 21: What would be the potential consequences of reducing JASPERS' budget?

## 2.2 Evaluation tasks and data collection activities

The evaluation consists of 5 interlinked tasks: Task 1 (Methodological Report), Task 2 (Review of JASPERS' activities in the years 2014–2020), Task 3 (In-depth evaluation of selected JASPERS assignments), Task 4 (Consultation activities) and Task 5 (Final Report).

Comprehensive data collection processes have been organised across the various tasks to collect data for the evaluation, as summarised in Table 2-2 below.

Table 2-2 Summary of data collection sources and processes

Task	Data collection process and sources
Task 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio analysis of JASPERS assignments covering the period January 2014–December 2018 based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data extracted from JADE</li> <li>- Data extracted from SFC 2014</li> <li>- CEF Reports</li> <li>- IPA data</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continuous follow-up calls and written exchanges with JASPERS representatives to clarify the data and ensure accuracy of the analysis</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> The efficiency criterion also included EQ 14: *What is JASPERS' cost-benefit ratio compared to the most common alternative schemes (for example private consultancy, in-house advisory or other relevant scheme)?* and EQ 15: *Are there any costs that could be rationalised?* However, due to data limitations, these questions were removed from the scope of the analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Due to limited data available, it was not possible to address the question fully.

Task	Data collection process and sources
Task 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth evaluation of 90 individual sampled assignments and assessment of 30 additional 'linked' assignments, i.e. 120 assignments in total which included documentary analysis of over 400 assignment documents and project documentation and 101 interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities. Results were reported in 87 assignment forms.</li> <li>• 9 comprehensive questionnaires completed by JASPERS staff covering the sample of 90 assignments</li> <li>• 14 interviews with 14 European Commission representatives covering various types of assignments</li> <li>• 11 interviews with the Director of JASPERS and Heads of Divisions during a mission in Luxembourg</li> <li>• 1 interview with 2 European Court of Auditors representatives who were involved in the previous ECA special report on JASPERS during a mission in Luxembourg</li> <li>• 6 country fiches including in-country group or individual interviews covering 75 representatives of managing authorities and beneficiaries</li> <li>• 3 group or individual interviews with representatives of JASPERS Regional Offices in Bucharest, Warsaw, Vienna covering 14 representatives</li> <li>• 7 interviews with representatives of alternative schemes</li> </ul>
Task 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seminar in Brussels involving more than 80 participants</li> <li>• Online targeted consultation collecting data from 210 respondents</li> </ul>

**Task 1** set the basis for the evaluation, structuring the data collection methods as well as the analytical approach in a Methodological Report. The methodological approach was further fine-tuned throughout the implementation of the assignment with a focus on clarity and transparency of the analytical approaches applied.

**Task 2** provided an analysis of the full portfolio of activities of JASPERS in the programming period from January 2014 to December 2018<sup>12</sup> and sampled 90 assignments and 6 countries for in-depth analysis as part of Task 3. The analysis of the portfolio of JASPERS activities was done based on data extracted from the *JASPERS database (JADE)* (January 2014–December 2018), the *DG REGIO database (SFC2014)* (all major projects submitted from January 2014–July 2019 with their status as of November 2019), as well as *DG MOVE data* (July 2015–March 2019) and *DG NEAR* (January 2014–October 2018) data provided via email by representatives of the two directorates. All data received was compiled in an Excel file. This file was used for the analysis of the portfolio of JASPERS assignments. The results of the analysis are presented in the report and in Appendix B on the portfolio analysis.

Based on the compiled Excel sheet combining JADE, SFC2014, DG MOVE and DG NEAR data, a sample of 90 assignments was selected. The 90 assignments were selected with a view to maximising the types of services, geographical and sector coverage of JASPERS activities

<sup>12</sup> Note that the cut-off date of the JASPERS dataset is January 2014 to December 2018. For SFC 2014, the cut-off date is all projects submitted up to July 2019 with the status as of November 2019. The status was manually collected by the evaluation team from SFC2014 for all projects.

encompassing both completed and administratively closed assignments<sup>13</sup>. Amongst the 90 assignments, 76 were completed and the remaining 14 were administratively closed.

ESIF major projects may be subject to both technical advisory services and review services: two separate JASPERS assignments – one for technical advisory support and one for review services. Although the tender specifications requested a sampling of assignments at the level of technical advisory for projects and review services, the selection of only one type of service for projects that benefited from multiple JASPERS services meant that the JASPERS effect at project level may not be fully captured. To address this, the sample of 90 assignments (summarised in Table 2-3) has been supplemented by also assessing the 'linked' assignments. This means that, for example, an advisory service included in the 90 assignments sample concerns a major project that was also subject to a review service, then the review service was also considered in the analysis. This provides a more holistic and deeper analysis of JASPERS services, which also adds to the understanding of the internal coherence of the services. The inclusion of these linked assignments expands the sample from the original 90 assignments to 120 cases. The distribution of the sample per type of services, sectors and status is presented below. The table focuses only on the sample of 90 assignments that were originally selected according to the tender specifications.

Table 2-3 Distribution of sample of selected 90 assignments across types of services and sectors as compared to the full population of JASPERS services (**completed and administratively closed, ongoing assignments not included**)\* (January 2014–December 2018)

Service \ Sector	RAM	ROD	WAW	ESW	SD	MULT	Total sample	% of portfolio	Total completed + admin. closed
Technical advisory	14	6	7	7	8	-	42	12%	349
<i>ESIF major projects</i>	4	3	5	3	3	-	18	9%	203
<i>ESIF non-major projects</i>	2	-	2	1	3	-	8	11%	76
<i>CEF projects<sup>14</sup></i>	8	2	-	-	-	-	10	29%	34
<i>IPA projects</i>	-	1	-	3	2	-	6	17%	36
Capacity building	5	-	1	1	-	4	11	34%	32
Horizontal/strategy	2	4	3	3	1	1	14	13%	110
Review	8	5	3	3	4	-	23	16%	147
<i>IQR</i>	3	2	1	1	3	-	10	29%	35
<i>PSA</i>	5	3	2	2	1	-	13	12%	112
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>638**</b>

<sup>13</sup> In line with the requirements of the tender specifications, ongoing assignments were not included in the sample.

<sup>14</sup> CEF projects includes both CEF mandate 1 and CEF mandate 2 (NB: 2 horizontal strategy support assignments are not included as they are ongoing).

Service \ Sector	RAM	ROD	WAW	ESW	SD	MULT	Total sample	% of portfolio	Total completed + admin. closed
% of portfolio	184	109	106	91	89	28	-	-	-
Total portfolio	16%	14%	13%	15%	15%	18%	-	-	-

Abbreviations: RAM – rail, air and maritime, ROD – roads, WAW – water and wastewater, ESW – energy and solid waste, SD – smart development, MULTI – multi-sector.

\* Linked assignments (30) are not counted in the table. Ongoing assignments are not included in the sample.

\*\* The portfolio also includes 19 assignments in the public transport and 2 in the urban sector. These are not shown in the table as no assignment was selected from these sectors in the sample but are counted in the total of 638.

**Task 3** comprised an in-depth evaluation of the sample of 90 JASPERS assignments and 30 additional 'linked' assignments and the development of 6 country fiches (Croatia, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). The analysis of the sample of assignments resulted in the development of **87 assignment forms<sup>15</sup>** (that were designed in line with the evaluation matrix) compiling data and assessments on the performance of JASPERS in specific assignments. The structure and contents of the assignment forms are explained in the Second Interim Report (section 3.1). The assignment forms rely on several sources of information:

- *Review of assignment documentation:* According to the JASPERS Quality Manual, for each assignment JASPERS produces documentation recording the support provided as part of the specific assignment. The type of documentation produced varies per type of mandate and type of assignment. Over 400 documents, including 73 action completion notes and project development reports, 22 PSA reports, 14 IQR reports, 14 interruption letters, 25 value added fiches, 33 feedback forms and reports, over 50 guidance notes, over 50 project applications and related documentation. A detailed overview of coverage of the documentary review of the sample of assignments is presented in the Second Interim Report (see section 3.1).
- *In-depth interviews with managing authorities and beneficiaries:* 102 interviews were conducted, i.e. 51 interviews with beneficiaries covering 52 assignments (57% of sampled assignments) and 51 managing authorities covering 69 assignments (73% of sampled assignments). The coverage by type of JASPERS service varied depending on the responsiveness of stakeholders. A detailed presentation of the number of interviews by type of service and coverage by type of assignment sampled is presented in the Second Interim Report (see section 3.1).
- *Interviews with the European Commission:* 14 interviews were conducted with representatives of DG REGIO (major projects unit and the geographical units), DG MOVE, DG NEAR. The interviews concerned both review services and capacity building (as relevant). In total, 13 interviews with DG REGIO staff were performed covering 38

<sup>15</sup> 3 capacity-building assignments that had been selected in the sample were administratively closed and merged into a fourth assignment that was also part of the sample of selected assignments. Given the interlinkages between these assignments, all 4 assignments were covered in one assignment fiche.

assignments, 2 interviews with DG MOVE (including the exploratory interview) and 1 interview with DG NEAR (exploratory phase).

- *Questionnaires for JASPERS:* Input from JASPERS was also received via 9 sector-level questionnaires covering the sample of assignments with detailed questions.
- *Interviews with JASPERS representatives:* 11 interviews with Heads of Divisions, the JASPERS Director and the Quality Manager were conducted in Luxembourg. The interviews collected data on the delivery of JASPERS services, the challenges and good practices in the delivery of JASPERS services across sectors and countries. Continuous follow-up calls and meetings with JASPERS staff were made to clarify the data and information collected.
- *Interviews with the European Court of Auditors:* Furthermore, interviews were conducted with 2 representatives of the Court of Auditors who were involved in the ECA study<sup>16</sup> concerning JASPERS.
- *Interviews with representatives of alternative schemes to JASPERS:* 7 interviews were conducted with representatives of alternative schemes to investigate the coherence and added value of JASPERS as compared to other similar initiatives. This included: EIB PASSA, SRSS, WB Bulgaria, WB Romania, WB Slovenia and WB Croatia, EIPA.

As mentioned above, in addition to the assignment forms, **6 country fiches** were developed to collect data concerning the implementation of JASPERS in the respective countries (Croatia, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). The analysis in the country fiches relied on data collected during field visits and in-person interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities. This was complemented with desk research, data from the portfolio analysis and the assignment forms. The in-country field visits covered:

- *Interviews with managing authorities and beneficiaries:* Group or individual interviews were conducted with a total of 75 representatives of national authorities and beneficiaries (including 26 representatives in Croatia, 7 representatives in Italy, 9 representatives in North Macedonia, 9 representatives in Poland, 16 representatives in Romania, 17 representatives in Slovakia). A detailed presentation of the data collection activities is presented in the Second Interim Report (section 3.2).
- *Interviews with JASPERS regional offices:* Group or individual interviews were conducted with representatives of the JASPERS regional offices during the field visits. Specifically, a group interview with 4 representatives from the Vienna JASPERS Office was conducted in the context of the field visit to Slovakia, a group interview was conducted with 8 representatives from the Bucharest JASPERS Office in the context of the field visit to Romania and a group interview was conducted with 2 representatives of the Warsaw JASPERS Office. A detailed presentation of the data collection activities is presented in the Second Interim Report (section 3.2).

As part of **Task 4** an online targeted consultation and a stakeholder seminar were completed. The *online consultation* was launched on 3 June 2019 and closed after 17 weeks, on 30 September 2019. A total of 210 respondents completed the set of questions<sup>17</sup> from all Member States, with

<sup>16</sup> European Court of Auditors (2018), Special Report JASPERS – time for better targeting, no. 01/2018.

<sup>17</sup> Amongst the total of 554 accesses registered to the survey link at which the online consultation was available, the online targeted consultation collected a total of 210 completed questionnaires, whereas the other 344 questionnaires were considered invalid either because they were empty (283) or completed only partially (61).

a high representation of respondents from Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia. A detailed presentation of results of the online consultation are included in Appendix D. Furthermore, a *seminar* organised by the consultant team was held in Brussels on 19 September 2019 in Brussels. Presentations were given by representatives of the Member States, representatives of JASPERS, representatives of the European Commission and the consultant team. Nearly 80 participants took part in the seminar. The seminar was attended by European Commission officials (around 20 including representatives of DG REGIO, DG ECFIN, DG ENV, DG CLIMA and DG MOVE), JASPERS (13), as well as managing authorities (34) or project beneficiaries (9) representing 16 Member States.

Finally, **Task 5** had the aim of triangulating and presenting the evaluation’s findings, conclusions and options for potential action, the result of which is presented in this Final Report.

### 2.3 Limitations and robustness of the findings

The evaluation takes place mid-way through the programming period when many JASPERS assignments/services are still ongoing or have just started (42% of the project portfolio was completed at the time of the evaluation). Whereas for some actions the effects will be immediate or materialise within a short time (e.g. the effects of advisory support on project preparation are visible upon approval of the project), for other types of services (e.g. capacity building and horizontal and strategy support) fundamental changes and impacts may have effects in the longer term and are not observable in the short term (e.g. improved capacity may take time to materialise or the effects of strategies advised by JASPERS may be visible only with the implementation of concrete projects guided by those strategies).

Importantly, the fact that there were some limitations in terms of the measurability of effects, outcomes, results, costs and benefits arising from JASPERS is also due to the evolving context related to the definition of objectives and processes over the analysed period. The original JASPERS Results Measurement Framework approved by the JASPERS Steering Committee in 2016 was adapted to respond to recommendations following the ECA report. Although the findings of the evaluation rely on robust and triangulated data, some limitations imposed by data availability and measurability of outcomes exist. An overview of areas where limitations per data source and evaluation criterion are found is presented in the table below and further elaborated subsequently.

The evaluation relies on a vast amount of data collected from various data sources (as presented in section Table 2-2 above). Given the sensitive nature of some of the information, a non-disclosure agreement was signed with JASPERS covering data coming in particular from documentation which limits the amount of information that can be disclosed through this evaluation.

Table 2-4 Overview of key limitations by data source and evaluation criterion

Data source	Limitation	Relevant for
Portfolio analysis (Task 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparability of data across mandates and services</li> <li>Data gaps and inconsistencies for data on specific services</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Efficiency Relevance
Financial information and data on time spent per assignment (Task 2/3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited availability of data on time spent (before February 2017 on all assignments and after 2017 for assignments beyond</li> </ul>	Efficiency

Data source	Limitation	Relevant for
Review documentation (90 assignments) (Task 3)	<p>those within the sample) and costs per assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited availability of data on costs of alternative sources</li> <li>Gap in terms of assignment documentation</li> </ul>	All criteria
In-depth interviews (90 assignments) <sup>18</sup> (Task 3), country fiches (Task 3), seminar (Task 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representativeness of the data collected</li> </ul>	All criteria
Online consultation (Task 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impossibility of distinguishing type-specific responses (respondents typically have a multi-assignment experience)</li> </ul>	All criteria

For the **portfolio analysis (Task 1)**, several key data limitations have implications on the robustness of the findings related to effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. The detailed limitations from the portfolio are elaborated in Appendix B.1.2, whereas the following highlights the key ones:

- Comparability of data across mandates and services:* The portfolio data was compiled based on several databases (JADE data, SFC2014, data on IPA and CEF). Different cut-off dates applied to the data for different data sources are explained in detail in Appendix B.1.2 on the portfolio analysis. This imposes limitations in terms of comparability of data across mandates and types of services.
- Data gaps and data inconsistencies in the JADE, SFC2014 datasets:* The portfolio data contained several data gaps that the evaluation mitigated by performing data quality checks on the JADE and SFC2014 databases. However, some data gaps remain, in particular:
- Data on stage of involvement of JASPERS advisory:* The JADE database records at what stage JASPERS becomes involved in the project preparation by indicating whether JASPERS was involved at 'Pre-feasibility', 'Feasibility' or 'Application' stage. However, data quality checks performed by the evaluation team indicate that projects may be assisted by JASPERS (i.e. supported by JASPERS advisory in the project preparation) several times throughout their lifecycle which renders the entries in JADE imprecise. This limits the analysis at portfolio level that could be performed concerning the stage of JASPERS intervention. Correcting the data on the stage of the intervention would require a thorough documentary analysis of *all* technical advisory assignments in the portfolio. This has implications on the findings on the effectiveness of JASPERS advisory support as the analysis concerning the stage of the JASPERS intervention could not be performed at portfolio level.

<sup>18</sup> Covering beneficiaries, managing authorities, European Commission, JASPERS.

- *Data on duration of PSA/IQR:* The JADE database does not systematically record separate JADE assignments for second (or subsequent) IQRs and PSAs. This limits the findings related to the amount of such assignments that were completed by JASPERS in the analysed time period. Furthermore, given that in cases where second (or subsequent) PSAs or IQRs were performed, no data on the timelines of these additional assignments was available. This reduces the findings related to the effect of review services on the timeline of projects.
- *Data on ESIF non-major projects:* The JADE and SFC2014 databases do not contain information on non-major projects beyond recording the technical advisory assignments for ESIF non-major projects. Since the projects can belong to various operational programmes, they are normally recorded in different databases. While some Member States have centralised databases containing this information, others have databases managed by the different managing authorities of various operational programmes. This imposed difficulties in collecting the data on the projects that were assisted by JASPERS. The evaluation team made a request for data to several managing authorities (Romania, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia) to help in the identification of the projects that were assisted by JASPERS and in the compilation of data on timelines (submission, approval, status), budget and other relevant variables. Data was obtained only from Croatia and Slovakia. This limited the analysis that could be performed concerning the effect of technical advisory support on the timeline of ESIF non-major projects and the possibility to compare ESIF non-major projects that had been assisted by JASPERS advisory with those that were not assisted (no counterfactual available).
- *Data on CEF projects and IPA projects:* The JADE database and the data provided by DG MOVE only contained information about JASPERS advisory-assisted CEF projects. However, the JADE database and the data provided by DG MOVE did not contain details concerning the timelines of the CEF projects. This limited the analysis that could be performed concerning the effect of technical advisory support on the timeline of CEF projects and the possibility of comparing CEF projects that had been assisted by JASPERS advisory with those that were not assisted (no counterfactual available). The data received from JASPERS and DG NEAR concerning IPA projects contained both information on IPA projects that had been assisted by JASPERS advisory and those that had not been assisted, which allowed a comparison in terms of numbers and volumes of financing. However, the datasets did not contain any data on the timelines of IPA projects, which limited the analysis of the effect of JASPERS advisory on IPA projects.
- *Scope of the data contained in the JADE, SFC2014 databases:* As already indicated above, the scope of the data contained in the JADE, SFC2014 databases and in the data received from DG MOVE and DG NEAR had some inherent limitations. Data relevant for some of the evaluation questions is not systematically collected in any of the available databases. Some of the key data gaps at the level of the portfolio are included in Text box 2-1. Although efforts to collect data were made by the evaluation team, gathering such data at the level of the portfolio would be beyond the scope of this assignment. Indications of the level of effort needed to collect such data are also provided in the box.

*Text box 2-1 Examples of data gaps at the level of the portfolio*

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on timeline of ESIF non-major projects, CEF projects, IPA projects (relevant for EQ 6) and data on non-assisted ESIF non-major, CEF projects, IPA projects (relevant for setting the counterfactual for</li> </ul> |
|--|

EQ 6). Collecting such data would have required an analysis of individual project applications or the identification of the specific assignments in the relevant national databases.

- Data on the timeline and content of informal IQR process (relevant for EQ 6, 5)<sup>19</sup>. Collecting such data would have required the compilation of dates from email exchanges for each of the IQR assignments in the portfolio.
- Data on the timeline and content of the completeness checks and first assessments for the IQRs (relevant for EQ 6, 5). Collecting such data would have required the compilation of dates and contents from email exchanges for each the IQR assignments in the portfolio. This was done for the sample of IQR assignments.
- Data on the timing of request for PSA by the European Commission (EQ 6). Collecting such data would have required the compilation of dates from email exchanges between the European Commission and the Head of IQR.
- Data on the number and type of issues raised in assignment documentation (relevant for EQ 5). Collecting such data would have required the mapping of critical issues from documentation (PSA reports, completeness checks for IQRs, first assessments for IQRs, interruption letters, action completion notes) for all assignments that were subject to IQR and PSA.

In terms of the data on [financial information and time spent per assignment](#) (Task 2 and 3), several key limitations have implications on the findings related to efficiency, in particular:

- *Data on time spent per assignment:* Data on man-days spent at assignment level have been collected systematically only as of February 2017 and were only available for the 87 assignment under in-depth analysis and not for the entire portfolio. In addition, the planning and management system do not foresee ex-ante indication of expected time spent, so actual time spent per assignment can only be compared to an average time spent and not with expected time per individual assignment.
- *Financial costs per assignment:* No financial cost per assignment (including financial cost of JASPERS staff, travel costs and external consultancy cost) was made available. This limited considerably the possibility of in-depth analysis of efficiency.
- *Data on alternative sources:* Financial data on possible alternative sources of similar services that could be benchmarked with those of JASPERS were also either not available or could not be used for different reasons (e.g. sensitivity issues, lack of clarity over the inclusion of overheads, incomparability of services delivered), hampering the possibility of discussing the cost-benefit ratio of JASPERS in comparison to alternative schemes.

In terms of data from the [review of assignment documentation for the 90 assignments](#) (Task 3) the key limitation having implications on the robustness of the findings relates to the *availability*

<sup>19</sup> According to the JASPERS Quality Manual (v1.4), in IQR assignments, the IQR division can be involved prior to the formal request for IQR from the managing authority. The IQR division may ask the corresponding sector divisions in JASPERS advisory about the status of projects that are expected to be submitted to IQR. The amount of information to be exchanged, as well as the specific involvement of IQR experts in terms of visits or exchanges with the advisory team will be discussed on a case-by-case basis. The JASPERS Quality Manual (v1.4) recommends that, at least 6 months before official submission of a project to the IQR division, the IQR team should be aware of the key documentation being prepared and the status of the project.

*of the relevant documentation.* The relevant assignment documentation was made available by JASPERS, but 6 assignments had no documentation since they were administratively closed. This included 1 assignment on a technical advisory ESIF major project, 2 assignments on horizontal and strategy support, and 3 assignments on capacity building. For the remaining 84 assignments the documentation was available, but some assignment documentation gaps were identified. These are elaborated in detail as part of the Second Interim Report (see section 3.3). The evaluation filled in these data gaps by conducting in-depth interviews with the managing authorities and beneficiaries, through the questionnaires addressed to JASPERS and by requesting written information from the national authorities (e.g. project documentation).

In terms of the data from the [interviews](#) (Task 3), the [country fiches](#) (Task 3) and the [seminar](#) (Task 4), a key limitation of the data collected by these means relates to the fact that, although the data collection tools cumulatively covered a large selection of representatives of managing authorities, beneficiaries, JASPERS, European Commission services (as shown in Table 2-2), the data collected does not provide statistically representative responses but rather helps in analysing country-specific issues and exploring options for future.

In terms of data on data from [online consultation](#) (Task 4) several key limitations are identified. Secondly, given that the questionnaire was addressed mainly to managing authorities and beneficiaries with extensive experience of collaboration on a wide range of services, it was not possible to systematically distinguish a type-specific response.

### 3 CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK OF JASPERS SERVICES

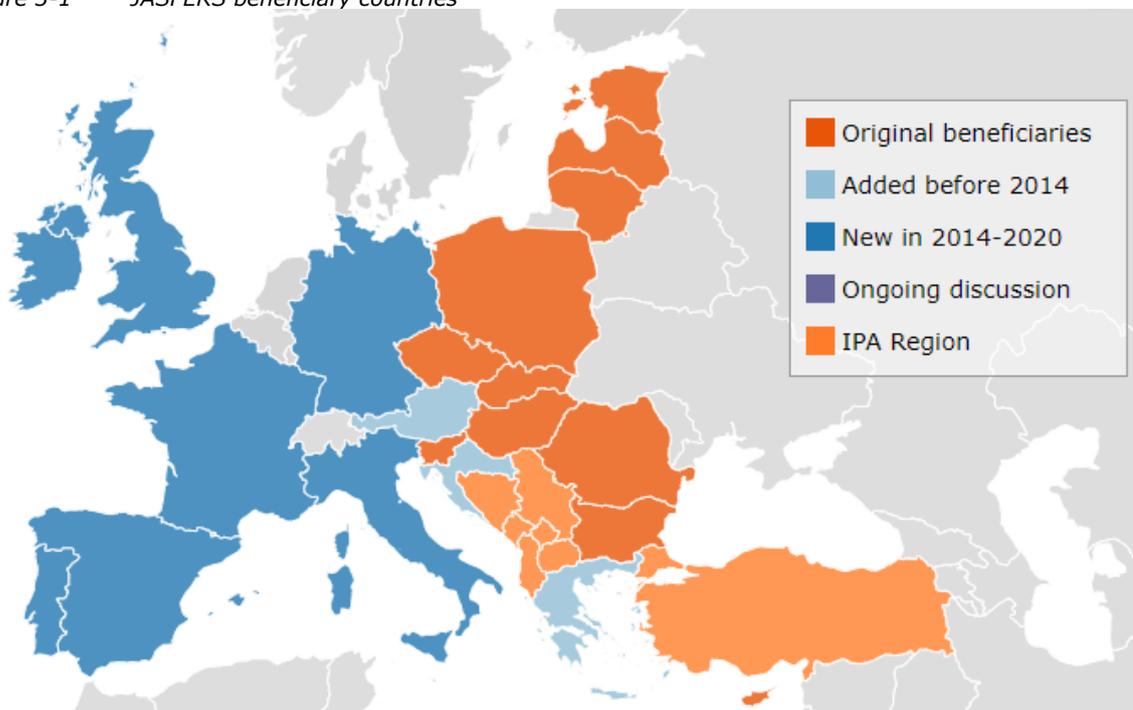
This chapter presents an overview of the context and institutional framework of JASPERS. The chapter is complemented by Appendix A containing a more detailed description of the JASPERS institutional framework.

#### 3.1 Context and governance

The **Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS)** technical assistance partnership was created in 2005 and launched in 2006 as a partnership between two European institutions to support the achievement of specific EU policy objectives. The partnership was established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and later the KfW. Currently, the initiative is implemented by the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The aim of JASPERS is to provide technical advisory and capacity-building support to EU Member States and IPA countries in managing EU funds and in the preparation and implementation of high-quality projects co-financed by the European Commission. Since its creation, JASPERS has evolved considerably, expanding its geographical scope, and the mandates and types of services covered. In the programming period 2007–2013, JASPERS support was available only to Member States that had joined in 2004 or after because they were expected to have less experience in project development. In the current programming period 2014–2020 (and hence within the scope of this mid-term evaluation), JASPERS support was expanded to all Member States requesting it and to candidate countries. The figure below illustrates the geographical coverage of JASPERS as of June 2020.

Figure 3-1 JASPERS beneficiary countries



Source: JASPERS website (15.06.2020)

In the programming period 2014–2020, JASPERS also expanded to cover not only projects under the European Structural and Investment Funds but also projects under the Connecting Europe

Facility<sup>20</sup> and through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, in the current programming period JASPERS has been tasked with providing review services to the European Commission for major project applications under ESIF.

### **Governance of JASPERS**

The overall foundation for the governance and administrative set-up of JASPERS is defined in the documents establishing the working arrangements between JASPERS and the European Commission, the **Framework Partnership Agreement** for the management of the JASPERS Technical Assistance Facility 2014–2020 (FPA 2014–2020)<sup>22</sup> and the **Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement** between the European Union and the European Investment Bank (FAFA)<sup>23</sup>. The two documents outline the overall roles and responsibilities of JASPERS as well as the roles and responsibilities of other parties involved in the management and implementation of JASPERS (e.g. the Steering Committee composed of the European Commission and the European Investment Bank). Further to the FPA 2014–2020 and FAFA, the different European Commission services have concluded Specific Grant Agreements with JASPERS under the three different mandates (ESIF, CEF, and IPA). The Specific Grant Agreements reiterate the roles and responsibilities of JASPERS and further elaborate on the types of services that JASPERS can provide under the different mandates. Further to this, regular Steering Committees with the participation of the European Commission and JASPERS provide guidance on the development of JASPERS.

### **Organisational structure**

JASPERS' **organisational structure** is defined in the JASPERS Quality Manual<sup>24</sup>. The organisational structure in place during the evaluation period was approved by the Steering Committee in November 2014. Overall, JASPERS is overseen by a Steering Committee comprising representatives of the EIB and the European Commission.

The work of JASPERS is supervised by the Director of JASPERS, who has overall responsibility for JASPERS results and reports to the Steering Committee. JASPERS is organised around 8 divisions: some are sector-specific, and others have a more horizontal purpose. The divisions are: Roads, Rail, Air and Maritime, Water and Wastewater, Smart Development, Energy and Solid Waste, Networking and Competence Centre, and the Independent Quality Review Division. In addition to these divisions, JASPERS also has a Quality Management Unit responsible for developing the quality management framework for JASPERS activities. The unit reports directly to the JASPERS Director. The 5 sector-specific divisions are in Luxembourg, together with the Networking and Competence Centre and the Quality Management Unit. Given the need for proximity and close interaction with the European Commission, as well as the need to maintain an independent stance,

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<sup>20</sup> Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is an EU funding instrument dedicated to the implementation of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). It aims to support investments in cross-border connections, missing links and promote sustainability and digitalisation. It is under the direct management of DG MOVE, while the technical and financial implementation of the CEF Programme is managed by INEA.

<sup>21</sup> The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the means by which the EU supports reforms in the 'enlargement countries' with financial and technical help.

<sup>22</sup> Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020, Brussels 20.11.2014, Luxembourg, 4.11.2014. Amendment No 1 to the Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020, 10.9.2015.

<sup>23</sup> Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Union and the European Investment Bank, Brussels, 7.5.2014, Luxembourg 8.5.2014. Amendment No 2 to the Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020, 10.9.2015.

<sup>23</sup> Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Union and the European Investment Bank, Brussels, 7.05.2014, Luxembourg 8.05.2014

<sup>24</sup> The JASPERS Quality Manual has been subject to 4 revisions. For the purposes of this evaluation, v1.2 (25/5/2018), v1.3 (29/6/2018) and v1.4 (6/6/2019) were reviewed.

the Independent Quality Review Division is in Brussels. In addition to the different divisions, JASPERS also has several regional offices in Bucharest, Vienna, Warsaw and Sofia. The regional offices cooperate in the implementation of specific assignments.

### **3.2 JASPERS mandates**

As compared to the 2007–2013 programming period, JASPERS mandates have expanded. In the previous period the JASPERS mandate only covered structural and cohesion funds, whereas now it includes two additional mandates. In the 2014–2020 programming period, JASPERS provides services across three main mandates, namely: **structural funds and cohesion (ESIF) mandate** (from DG REGIO), **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) mandate** (from DG MOVE) and **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) mandate** (from DG NEAR).

#### *3.2.1 Structural funds and cohesion mandate (ESIF mandate)*

Under the **European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) mandate**, JASPERS provides technical assistance support to major projects and non-major projects that are co-financed under the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Specific Grant Agreements between JASPERS and DG REGIO outline the framework conditions (budget, scope of services) for JASPERS. JASPERS signs yearly Specific Grant Agreements with DG REGIO which outline the key functions of JASPERS and the proportion of yearly financing for JASPERS activities. Services provided by JASPERS under this mandate include: technical advisory services to ESIF major projects and ESIF non-major projects (including project development, project implementation support), review services (post-submission appraisals or independent quality reviews), capacity-building and horizontal and strategy support services.

Under the **ESIF** mandate, JASPERS provides technical advisory services to **major projects**, which constitutes the largest share of JASPERS activities (as further elaborated in section 3.2.3 below). Major projects are defined in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (or Common Provisions Regulation) as large-scale infrastructure projects in transport, environment and other sectors such as culture, education, energy or ICT which have been included as part of the operational programmes and have been subject to a Commission Decision under Article 96(10) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 or under Article 8(12) of the ETC Regulation, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. Major projects have a total eligible cost exceeding EUR 50,000,000 or, in the case of operations contributing to the thematic objective promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures where the total eligible cost exceeds EUR 75,000,000.<sup>25</sup>

Major projects are submitted to the European Commission under the ESIF mandate and can be assisted by JASPERS advisory support in their preparation prior to their submission to the European Commission. Project support can relate to the conceptual development and design of projects, advice on specific aspects of project preparation, review of documentation such as feasibility studies, Environmental Impact Assessment, advice on compliance with EU law (including state aid), assistance in the review, preparation and completion of applications for funding, advice on implementation issues such as project management or procurement. Upon completion of the project preparation phase, major projects are submitted for approval to the European Commission.

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<sup>25</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, Article 100.

Member States can choose between several different submission modalities as per Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The submission modalities are outlined in Article 102.1, 102.2 and 103 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Projects that are submitted by Member States under Article 102.1 or Article 102.2 undergo independent quality review by JASPERS, which is formally requested by the managing authorities once the project preparation is completed. Under Article 102.2, major projects are submitted directly to the European Commission, which formally requests JASPERS to conduct a post-submission appraisal of the major project. Finally, under Article 103, major projects that are phased from the previous programming period can be submitted by managing authorities. The text box below outlines the key submission modalities for ESIF major projects.

*Text box 3-1 Process for submission and appraisal of an ESIF major project*

- As per Article 100 of the Common Provisions Regulation, before the project is submitted, the managing authority checks if the following information is available: details concerning the body to be responsible for implementation of the major project and its capacity; description of the investment and location; total cost and total eligible cost; feasibility studies including option analysis and results; cost-benefit analysis including economic and financial analysis and risk assessment; analysis of environmental impacts and climate change adaptation and mitigation needs; consistency of the major project with the priority axes of the operational programmes; financing plan; and timetable for implementation.
- As per Article 102.1 of the Common Provisions Regulation, the European Commission takes a decision on the major project after the project is positively appraised by the independent quality review function of JASPERS. Upon receipt of a positive independent quality review, the project is notified to the European Commission together with the project application and the independent quality review report providing a clear statement of the feasibility and economic viability of the project. Based on the information submitted, the European Commission tacitly approves or refuses the financial contribution within 3 months of the date of the notification.
- As per Article 102.2 of the Common Provisions Regulation, the European Commission takes a decision on the major project based on the full package of documentation in line with Article 100 of the CPR. Prior to taking a decision, the European Commission formally requests a post-submission appraisal by JASPERS of the major project application.
- As per Article 103 of the Common Provisions Regulation, the European Commission takes a decision on the major project based on similar documentation as submitted for projects under Article 102.2 together with a confirmation that no substantial changes were made to the application as compared to the previous submission. No independent quality review from JASPERS is required if the major project is submitted under this procedure.

Source: Regulation EU No 1303/2013

Major projects are approved by the European Commission if the quality review criteria included in Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014 are fulfilled<sup>26</sup>. The quality review criteria include for example: technical, legal and financial soundness of the project, eligibility of the project, reliability of demand analysis, and adequacy of the technology proposed.

<sup>26</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 of 3 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

The full list of quality criteria that the projects are appraised against is presented in Appendix A on the JASPERS institutional analysis (Appendix A.1.3).

In the current programming period, Member States committed to submit a total of 563 major projects to the European Commission. Up to July 2019, a total of 302 projects were submitted across Member States. Among the projects submitted, 282 were tacitly approved or adopted by the European Commission as of November 2019<sup>27</sup>. As shown in the figures below, most projects were submitted and adopted under Article 102.2 (45%, 126 major projects). Another 102 were submitted and adopted under Article 103 and only 54 projects under Article 102.1. More than half of the major projects (57%) that were adopted or approved by the European Commission had been assisted by JASPERS advisory.

Figure 3-2 Number of major projects adopted/approved under Art. 102.1, 102.2 and 103 (N=282, January 2014–July 2019) \*

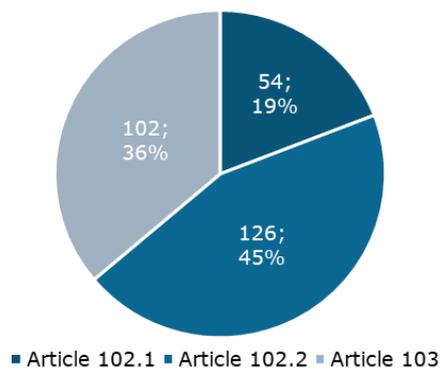
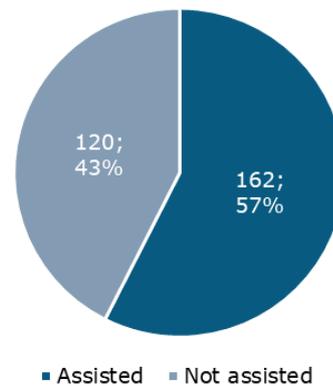


Figure 3-3 Number of adopted/approved major projects assisted and not assisted by JASPERS (N=282, January 2014–July 2019) \*

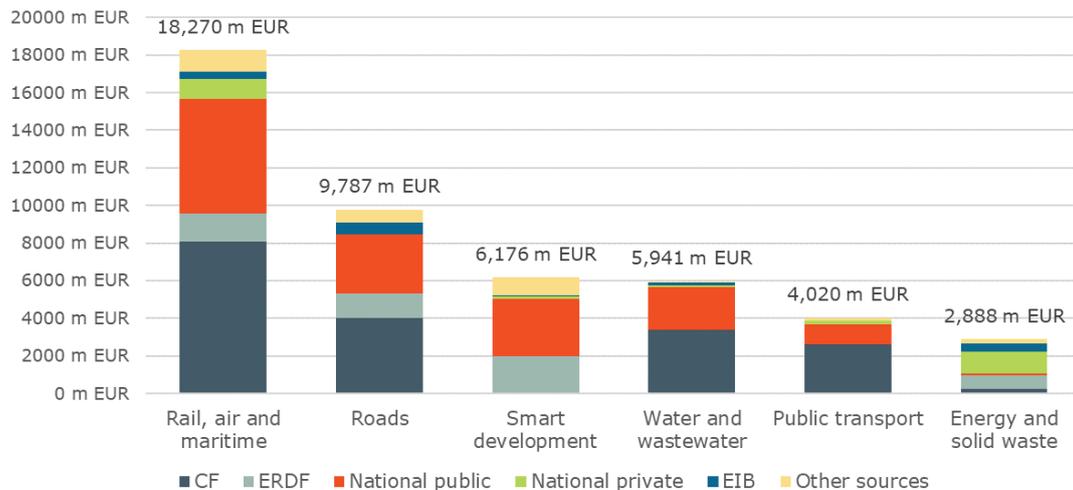


Source: SFC 2014 (\*) all ESIF major projects submitted from January 2014 to July 2019 with their status as of November 2019

Major projects assisted by JASPERS advisory cover all sectors, and the total investment costs for all 162 such approved/adopted projects as of November 2019 amounts to EUR 47 billion. Across the 120 non-assisted projects, the total investment cost amounts to EUR 35.3 billion. On average, projects that were assisted and not assisted had similar total investment costs (around EUR 290 million) although projects that were not assisted were slightly larger on average (by EUR 4 million). However, the volume of financing from EU funds (both CF and ERDF) was proportionally larger for projects that were assisted by JASPERS as compared to projects that were not assisted (EUR 23 billion for assisted projects as compared to EUR 13 billion for non-assisted projects). The figures below show the distribution of financing volumes by sectors and financing sources for both assisted and non-assisted projects.

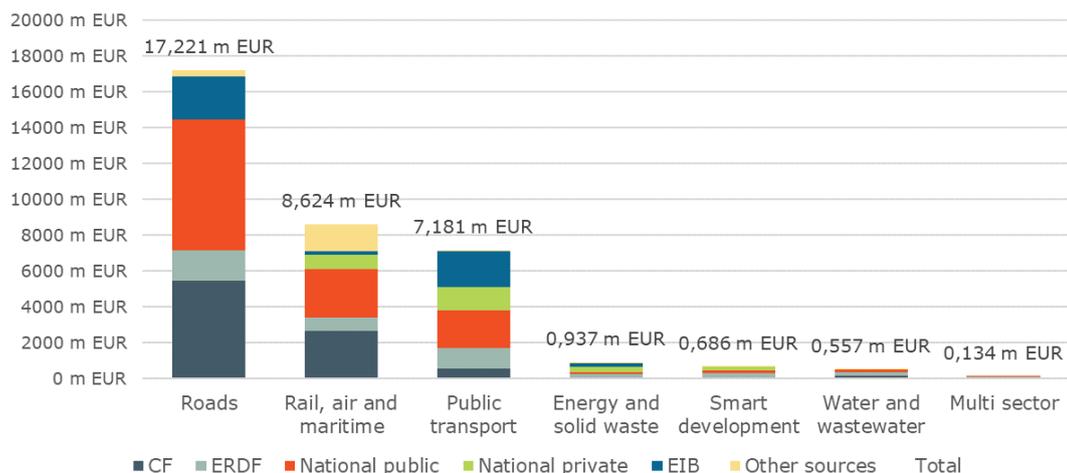
<sup>27</sup> Different cut-off dates are used due to the way the data was extracted. The list of projects submitted to the European Commission was extracted as of July 2019 but the data on the approval/adoption date was updated as of November 2019.

Figure 3-4 Volume of financing for ESIF **major projects approved/adopted** by the European Commission and **assisted** by JASPERS (N=162, January 2014–July 2019) \*



Source: SFC2014 (\*) all ESIF major projects submitted from January 2014 to July 2019 with their status as of November 2019

Figure 3-5 Volume of financing for ESIF **major projects approved/adopted** by the European Commission and **not assisted** by JASPERS (N=120, January 2014–July 2019) \*



Source: SFC2014 (\*) all ESIF major projects submitted from January 2014 to July 2019 with their status as of November 2019

**Non-major projects** can also benefit from JASPERS technical advisory services in relation to project preparation and implementation. Non-major projects are approved at Member State level by the managing authority and the types of support provided by JASPERS for such projects are similar to those for major projects. Non-major projects assisted by JASPERS are primarily projects in smaller Member States, but JASPERS has also assisted non-major projects in larger Member States that have relevance as pilot projects, or which can be replicated on a wider scale. In the period from January 2014 to December 2018, JASPERS supported 140 ESIF non-major projects. Data on the proportion of projects that have been assisted by JASPERS out of all the ESIF non-major projects submitted in this period is not available due to data limitations. This is further elaborated in Appendix B on the portfolio analysis (Appendix B.1.2)

Further to technical advisory services to ESIF projects, JASPERS can provide horizontal and strategy support in the development of upstream strategies and policies as well as capacity-building and networking support under the ESIF mandate.

### 3.2.2 *Connecting Europe Facility Transport (CEF mandate)*

Under the **Connecting Europe Facility – Transport (CEF), mandate** JASPERS can help Member States to develop projects intended for financing CEF. JASPERS and DG MOVE concluded two Specific Grant Agreements, one for CEF and another for CEF-2, in both cases the CEF support accounts for 90% of eligible costs.

Under the CEF-1 mandate (2014–2018), the JASPERS technical advisory support covered all aspects of project development. This included preparatory work for delivering CEF projects with a view to ensuring that projects are successful in the selection process organised by the Commission and that they receive co-funding from CEF. Furthermore, advisory services also included support for the implementation of projects. JASPERS assistance under the CEF 1 mandate focused on cohesion countries, with a list of projects and countries pre-identified in the Specific Grant Agreement. Similarly, under the CEF-2 mandate (2018-2020), the JASPERS technical advisory function concerns all phases and aspects of project development, as required, to deliver projects that ensure they are successful in the selection process organised by the European Commission to receive co-financing from CEF, in particular for CEF Blending Calls. Assistance under this mandate was open to all Member States and coordinated with the European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH).

Under the CEF-1 mandate, a total of 31 projects were supported in Bulgaria (3), Croatia (2), Hungary (8), Romania (8), Slovakia (9) and Slovenia (1). The projects address the following transport subsectors: rail (24), rivers and ports (3), and roads (4). 5 assignments are ongoing, of which 4 have been transferred and 1 potentially transferred to the JASPERS CEF-2 mandate. In total, 8 assignments are to be transferred under CEF-2 mandate. The combined estimated costs of the global projects linked to the JASPERS assignments supported through this mandate amounts to over EUR 8 billion. CEF approved 26 actions linked to the JASPERS assignments. The combined estimated costs of the projects linked with these 26 actions amount to almost EUR 7 billion, while the grants approved by DG MOVE amount to almost EUR 3 billion.<sup>28</sup>

Under the CEF-2 mandate, for the year 2018, a total of 5 JASPERS assignments have been delivered in Spain (4) and the Czech Republic (1). 2 assignments are ongoing and concern strategy support to the national authorities. The assignments are linked to CEF projects with a total estimated investment amount above EUR 2.7 billion. 7 project proposals connected with these assignments were submitted to CEF in 2018, of which 4 were submitted to the 2017 CEF Transport Blending Call and 3 to the 2018 CEF Transport Call. The combined total estimated investment costs of the project proposals linked to the assignments supported by JASPERS amounted to EUR 244.9 million.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2.3 *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA mandate)*

Under the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) mandate**, assistance is provided to IPA beneficiary countries in the development of sector strategies and project pipelines for IPA II financing and in the development of a) projects identified by the beneficiaries' National Investment Committees and b) regional transport and energy priority projects identified in the Western Balkans 6 Connectivity Agenda. Projects in IPA countries are identified as part of the sector operational programmes and are selected for funding in line with the priorities determined in the national strategic documents and the national Public Investment Programme.

<sup>28</sup> JASPERS (2019), J-CEF support, Final Report.

<sup>29</sup> JASPERS (2018), J-CEF 2 support, Final Report.

For the IPA mandate, JASPERS and DG NEAR concluded two Specific Grant Agreements, one for IPA II and one for Serbia. The agreement concluded on IPA II envisages that JASPERS will provide project preparation support, advice on horizontal issues, support in project implementation and networking and training. Project support is to be embedded in Country Action Plans. Modifications to the Country Action Plans are to be done in cooperation with the European Commission and the EU Delegations. The Specific Grant Agreement for Serbia outlines in a similar manner the assistance that JASPERS would provide, which relates to project preparation and advice on horizontal issues.

In the period analysed, January 2014 to December 2018, a total of 295 projects were active in the IPA database, of which JASPERS assistance was provided to only 17 IPA projects. The projects that were assisted were found in three IPA countries, i.e. Serbia (10 projects) N. Macedonia (5 projects), and Montenegro (2 projects). However, only 4 of those projects were completed: 2 in Montenegro and 2 in Serbia. The remaining 13 projects were active.

### 3.3 JASPERS services

In the period January 2014 to December 2018, JASPERS was involved in 1,093 assignments covering all three mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA) and types of services (technical advisory services, capacity building, horizontal/strategy support and review services). The largest volume of assignments in which JASPERS was involved concerned technical advisory services for ESIF major, non-major, CEF and IPA projects (i.e. 678, 62% of all assignments). In comparison, JASPERS was involved in proportionally fewer horizontal/strategy support assignments (188, 17% of assignments), review services (172, 16% of all assignments) and capacity-building services (55, 5% of assignments).

Table 3-1 Number of assignments by type of service (N=1,093 completed, administratively closed, and ongoing, January 2014–December 2018)

	Completed		Ongoing		Admin. closed		Total	
	#	% *	#	% *	#	% *	#	%
Technical advisory services	297	43%	329	49%	52	8%	678	62%
ESIF major projects	172	40%	225	53%	31	7%	428	39%
ESIF non-major projects	66	47%	64	46%	10	7%	140	13%
CEF projects <sup>30</sup>	32	94%	-	-	2	6%	34	3%
IPA projects	27	35%	40	53%	9	12%	76	7%
Capacity building	29	53%	23	42%	3	5%	55	5%
Horizontal/strategy support	74	39%	78	42%	36	19%	188	17%
Review services	144	84%	25	15%	3	2%	172	16%
PSA	112	95%	6	5%	-	-	118	11%

<sup>30</sup> Assignments for CEF projects includes both CEF-1 mandate (31 technical advisory assignments) and CEF-2 mandate (3 advisory and 2 horizontal and strategy support assignment).

	Completed		Ongoing		Admin. closed		Total	
	#	% *	#	% *	#	% *	#	%
IQR	32	59%	19	35%	3	6%	54	5%
Total	544	50%	455	42%	94	9%	1,093	100%

Source: JADE database extracted in 2019 (\* % shows the percentage for the total of assignments for this service)

NB: The dataset received from JADE and the CEF 1 and 2 Reports covered cumulatively 1,121 assignments. However, 28 assignments were outside the cut-off date having been recorded with a date of completion prior to January 2014.

While the table above presents the full overview of the portfolio of JASPERS assignments in the analysed period, subsequent chapters present the analysis by different dimensions of the portfolio. Subsequent chapters present the figures on the completed and ongoing assignments together, whereas the figures for administratively closed assignments are referred to separately.

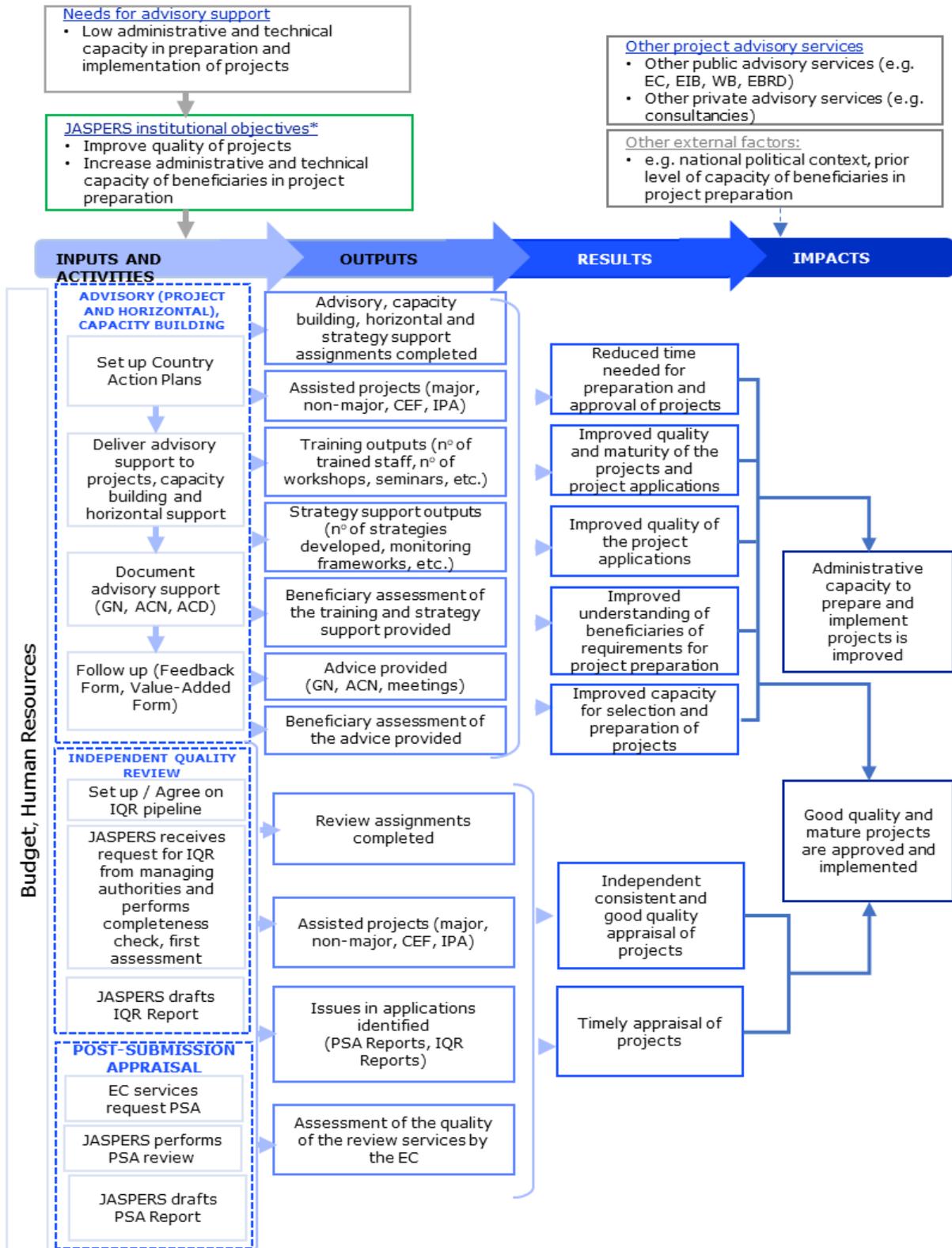
### 3.4 JASPERS intervention logic

The figure below showcases (still in a simplified manner) the complexity of the intervention logic of JASPERS covering all types of services, i.e. technical advisory services to projects, horizontal and strategy support, capacity building, and review services (IQR and PSA). In terms of mandates, while review (independent quality review and post-submission appraisal) services are provided only for the ESIF mandates, the other JASPERS services (technical advisory support to projects, horizontal and strategy support and capacity building) can be provided for all three mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA).

As outlined below, the JASPERS initiative has a dual objective, i.e.

- To support the development of good quality and mature projects that are approved swiftly by the European Commission or the managing authorities. This objective is intended to be achieved across all mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA); and
- To support the development of the administrative capacity of managing authorities and beneficiaries in preparing and implementing good quality and mature projects.

Figure 3-6 JASPERS intervention logic



### 3.5 Quality Management and Results Measurement Framework

Quality Management is a key component of the JASPERS internal management processes. Quality management within JASPERS is focused on defining the governance framework (including strategic objectives) as well as operational processes related to JASPERS services. The Quality Management approach (QM) is described in the JASPERS Quality Manual and is applicable to all services and mandates of JASPERS. The Quality Manual and Quality Management approach was defined following the EFQM model<sup>31</sup>.

The previous ECA and IAS reports found that JASPERS' effectiveness and efficiency was dependent on the clarity of the overall objectives and strategic direction of JASPERS but that the objectives had not been clearly defined in the previous programming period (2007–2013). As a result of the ECA recommendations and the Action Plan jointly agreed upon with the European Commission<sup>32</sup>, JASPERS worked on further fine-tuning its overall strategic objectives. The high-level strategy map of JASPERS outlines a number of objectives, including:

- **Institutional objectives:** (1) Provide advisory support to improve the quality of projects and strategies, (2) Increase administrative and technical capacities of beneficiaries in relation to project and strategy preparation.
- **Customer:** (1) Ensure stakeholder satisfaction with JASPERS intervention, (2) Create value by contributing to the objectives of our partners (EC, EIB).
- **Financial and risk:** (1) Use human, financial and other resources efficiently/effectively, (2) Identify, monitor and mitigate main risks for JASPERS (operational, financial, reputational).
- **Internal processes:** (1) Ensure consistency of advice across JASPERS, (2) Promote continuous improvement in processes and information systems.
- **People and learning:** (1) Maintain high staff motivation and skills, (2) Develop and optimise operational synergies and enhance knowledge sharing with JASPERS.

JASPERS' operational processes are outlined in the [JASPERS Quality Manual](#), initially drawn up in July 2017. It replaced the JASPERS Procedures Manual from November 2010 and ad-hoc communications to staff that took place in the subsequent period. The Quality Manual has been revised four times since its initial development: in November 2017 to review and integrate comments from JASPERS management; in May 2018 to include completeness check to IQR and update the signature rules and review of JASPERS mandates description; in June 2018 to update the JASPERS strategy map; and most recently in June 2019 to reflect the changes to the IQR process due to the Omnibus Regulation, to include CEF-2 mandate requirements, to update the assignment creation process and introduce updates to the risk management procedure and feedback process. The revisions to the JASPERS Quality Manual also reflect the Action Plan that was developed as a result of the ECA and IAS recommendations<sup>33</sup>.

JASPERS' Quality Management Unit has developed in cooperation with the Commission a [Results Measurement Framework \(RMF\)](#) to measure the performance of JASPERS towards the achievement of the high-level objectives. The Results Measurement Framework also outlines a

<sup>31</sup> EFQM is a model for quality management in organisations. See: [www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org)

<sup>32</sup> Action Plan to address ECA and IAS recommendations for agreement by the JASPERS Steering Committee, December 2017

<sup>33</sup> The Action Plan to address the ECA and IAS comments was adopted in December 2017. An update on the progress on the Action Plan was provided by JASPERS to DG REGIO in January 2019.

key performance indicators system and targets for JASPERS in terms of achievement of overarching objectives. A refinement of the JASPERS RMF was triggered by the ECA recommendations to improve processes. The methodological work on the improvement of the quality management system is still ongoing. Most recently, JASPERS presented the results of the RMF in the Steering Committee meeting of 18 September 2019. The methodology for calculation of the key performance indicators has not been shared with the evaluation team. The RMF results is also the basis upon which JASPERS creates its Operational Plan which then guides JASPERS in the assessment of needed resources and for developing the annual budget estimates formalised in the Annual Specific Grant.

### 3.6 Alternative schemes

In line with the Better Regulation Guidelines, as part of the evaluation activities the tender specifications require the consideration of schemes that could be an alternative to JASPERS (*for example private consultancy, in-house advisory or other relevant scheme*). A scoping exercise has been carried out to identify relevant alternatives. It was not possible to identify alternative schemes that can provide exactly the same level and scope of services and are thus fully comparable, however it is still useful to discuss existing alternative advisory, capacity-building and review schemes that to some extent could complement or substitute at least some aspects of the JASPERS services. This section introduces the key schemes that provide similar services to those provided by JASPERS.

#### Alternative advisory schemes

At EU level, but also for IPA countries, several advisory and technical assistance schemes are available that provide support in project preparation and implementation. A few examples of schemes that can be considered alternative advisory services are presented below and further elaborated in Appendix A of this report and in the Second Interim Report, section 4.5.1.

Table 3-2 Schemes for advisory services

	Scope	Sector focus	TA manager	TA provider(s)
JASPERS	advisory services for planning, preparation and implementation of investment projects	Rail, air and maritime, water and wastewater, roads, energy and solid waste, smart development, public transport	EIB	EIB
European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH)	Support in identifying, preparing and developing investment projects across the EU	Energy, transport, SMEs, telecommunications, R&D, agriculture, environment, other	EIB	EIB/other financial institutions/external consultants
EIB-PASSA	Supports project implementation and capacity-building in Romania and Bulgaria	Environment, solid waste, transport, health and horizontal issues	EIB	EIB External consultants
Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF)	Provides technical assistance for infrastructure projects in Western Balkan countries (EU accession)	Energy, environment, social, transport and digital infrastructure	Joint initiative of EU, IFIs and others	External consultant
Structural Reform Support	Support on structural, institutional and administrative reforms	Job creation and sustainable growth	EC	EC

	Scope	Sector focus	TA manager	TA provider(s)
Service (SRSS) Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)	Technical assistance for preparation of projects	Energy, telecommunications, transport	EIB	EIB/external consultants

Source: European Commission's Impact Assessment on the proposed Regulation establishing InvestEU and desk research

A key provider of advisory services is the European Investment Bank, which makes available to beneficiaries other advisory and technical assistance services through the EIB-PASSA, EIAH, and ELENA amongst others. EIB-PASSA is a notable scheme that provides services somehow similar to those of JASPERS. The assignment forms and country fiches used in the context of this evaluation highlighted it as a scheme that is used by beneficiaries. In the context of the 6 country fiches and 90 assignments, some beneficiary countries (Romania, Bulgaria) indicated that they make use of EIB-PASSA services. However, such services focus on a later stage of the project cycle (i.e. the implementation stage) as compared to JASPERS. EIB-PASSA's business model is characterised by proximity to clients (like JASPERS) and clients pay for the services (through the technical Assistance budgets of ESIF). EIB-PASSA delivers services mainly on infrastructure projects in various sectors, such as environment, solid waste and transport, but also in the health sector and horizontal issues (e.g. public procurement) which are only covered to a limited extent by JASPERS. EIB-PASSA frequently resorts to external consultants (sourced through the EIB framework), both international and local. On individual projects, EIB-PASSA may bring in specific experts from the EIB Project Directorate (e.g. engineers).

Another important provider of relevant advisory support is the European Commission. More specifically, through the SRSS emphasis is put on structural, institutional and administrative reforms rather than one-off projects (e.g. individual infrastructure projects). Moreover, the SRSS already maintains a systematic dialogue with both EIAH and JASPERS for the identification of projects where they could assist. As such, it cannot be considered as an alternative to JASPERS for technical advisory support.

Other international organisations (e.g. the World Bank) can be considered as potential alternative providers of horizontal/strategic support and technical advisory support, but organisation-specific constraints (e.g. geographical scope, type of activity and/or institutional agreements with national governments) may represent limitations for use. However, the lack of an EU-specific perspective and expertise may de facto prevent their substitutability.

Private consultancies could cover JASPERS tasks in horizontal and strategic support and technical advisory support (e.g. through framework contracts). In addition, technical assistance services provided to managing authorities and paid for through the specific technical assistance budget within Operational Programmes can be considered as an alternative for specific technical advisory tasks (e.g. phasing assignments). However, the cost of managing procurement processes and contracts for the EC and national authorities cannot be overlooked.

### **Alternatives available for capacity building and training**

For many capacity-building and training assignments, international organisations, specialised consulting companies, and research centres could effectively offer tailor-made courses and

assistance, potentially at the same quality level<sup>34</sup>. Although alternative schemes to JASPERS could also be identified for train the trainer activities, it can be argued that JASPERS is better placed than other organisations to deliver this kind of training.

### Alternatives available for review services

In the previous programming period, review services were provided by private consultants through framework contract agreements. The consultants provided 'quick appraisals'<sup>35</sup> through standard checklists and forms. In the previous programming period (2007–2013), the execution of a quick appraisal report could not exceed 15 calendar days, but the scope of the assessment was different in the previous programming period<sup>36</sup>. In contrast, review services provided by JASPERS take up to 30 days to be delivered. In the current programming period, as mentioned above, the European Commission relies solely on JASPERS for the provision of the review services. This decision was made to ensure a higher level of quality standardisation and comparability. While quick appraisals used to have a unitary price, PSA reports prepared by JASPERS are not assigned a monetary value.

### 3.7 Evaluations and audits of JASPERS

As mentioned above, JASPERS' performance was assessed in a **special report** conducted by the **European Court of Auditors (ECA)**<sup>37</sup> and an **audit report** performed by the **Internal Audit Service of the European Commission**. The findings of these reports, especially the ECA audit, are used throughout this evaluation. At national level, the JASPERS initiative was subject to a coordinated audit conducted by the audit bodies in Croatia and Poland<sup>38</sup>. The ECA audit includes four overall areas of observation regarding JASPERS:

- Weaknesses in the definition of JASPERS' main objectives resulted in shortcomings in its operations.
- JASPERS had an impact on project quality but could not impact absorption.
- The impact of JASPERS on administrative capacity of Member States had not yet resulted in greater independence from JASPERS assistance.
- Significant shortcomings in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of JASPERS activities put the successful operation of the initiative at risk.

As a result of the conclusions and recommendations of the ECA and IAS reports, JASPERS and the European Commission services have developed a joint Action Plan to address the ECA and IAS recommendations<sup>39</sup>. The Action Plan contains both strategic recommendations concerning the high-level strategy plan as well as more operational recommendations on improving processes for delivery of JASPERS services. The key recommendations ECA are listed below:

<sup>34</sup> See for example the training offer of the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), training services provided by private consultancies on framework contracts with the EC services, including DG REGIO, or other specialised training courses, such as the Milan Summer School on Cost-Benefit Analysis (<https://www.csilmilano.com/Summer-School/Summer-School.html>).

<sup>35</sup> See for example the tender specifications to call for tenders 'Multiple framework contract' 2013CE16BAT064, Ref. Ares (2014)1531385 - 14/05/2014.

<sup>36</sup> Guidance on how to use the Framework Contract 'in cascade' CCI 2009CE160AT090, renewed as from 03/12/2012 to request a 'Quick Appraisal'.

<sup>37</sup> European Court of Auditors (2018), Special Report JASPERS – time for better targeting, no. 01/2018.

<sup>38</sup> Synthesis Report on the coordinated audit on Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions.

<sup>39</sup> Action Plan to address the ECA and IAS recommendations as of 30 October 2017, updated January 2019.

The first recommendations focuses on the high-level strategy plan; the working arrangement and the SGAs; relate to the strategic planning of JASPERS in order to strengthen the link to Members State needs and the Cohesion Policy.

Specific recommendations concerning the Country Action Plans and the linked assignment fiches focus on making the planning more strategic and include clearer priorities. Also, the action completion notes, and the estimation of added value are addressed, focusing on the fact that all assignments will receive a follow-up in terms of a report and an assessment. The recommendation proposes the introduction of a system for monitoring the delivery of JASPERS services, which should also ensure that the actual costs of JASPERS assistance are monitored and compared against outputs and results.

Recommendations regarding the focus of JASPERS were also included. Concerns were expressed that JASPERS is involved too late in the process and, thus, concentrates on project documentation rather than substance. Emphasis was put on the fact that JASPERS should continue focusing on capacity building in particular through the train-the-trainer approach. The roles and responsibilities of JASPERS and the stakeholders were also subject to recommendations. This was in particular related to the impartiality of JASPERS in connection with technical advisory and IQR assignments.

Table 3-3 includes an overview of the recommendation topics in the ECA report (with reference to the recommendation number), a summary of the action included in the action plan and reference to where the topic is discussed in the present report. Not all recommendations are included in this table nor in the report, as some recommendations and actions refer to procedures and relations between the European Commission and JASPERS, which are not subject to this evaluation.

*Table 3-3 Overview of key actions foreseen in the Action Plan to address the ECA and IAS Recommendations*

Recommendation topic and number	Action foreseen in Action Plan	Addressed in report (section, service, criteria)
High-level strategy plan (ECA 1a;)	Revise institutional objectives	3.5 Quality Management and Results Measurements
Working arrangements (ECA 1d, 1e)	Working arrangement short version To be referred to in SGAs	4.1 Processes of technical advisory services
Country Action Plans (ECA 1a, 1c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce review process including strategic direction</li> <li>• To include all assignments</li> <li>• Complement with introduction of CP priorities for MS and sectors</li> </ul>	Relevance (EQ2) Section 4.3.1 7.2.2 Efficiency of planning, management and monitoring (EQ12)
Assignment (project) Fiches (ECA 3a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be discussed with Commission services prior to approval</li> <li>• To be required for all assignments</li> <li>• To include more detail on added value; estimate of JASPERS</li> </ul>	4.3.1 Relevance in meeting the needs of the Member States (EQ 2) 7.2.1 Effectiveness of planning, management and monitoring (EQ 4)

Recommendation topic and number	Action foreseen in Action Plan	Addressed in report (section, service, criteria)
Action completion notes (ECA 1a)	Action completion notes should be used for all assignments	7.2.1 Effectiveness of planning, management and monitoring (EQ 4)
Added value (ECA 1a, 3a)	To be evaluated in action completion notes and added value fiche	7.2.1 Effectiveness of planning, management and monitoring (EQ 4)
KPIs (ECA 1a)	To define KPIs (country and sector) To capture capacity building	7.2.2 Efficiency of planning, management and monitoring (EQ12)
Monitoring report on resource allocation (ECA 5a-d)	Monitoring report per type of expert for specific assignments (report six monthly)	7.2.2 Efficiency of planning, management and monitoring (EQ12)
Transparency of roles and processes (ECA 1d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division of roles of JASPERS in relation to technical advisory and IQR</li> <li>• Obligations of actors</li> </ul>	4.3.4 Coherence of technical advisory (EQ 16) 6.3.4 Coherence of review services (EQ 1Q)
Focus of JASPERS advisory (ECA 3a, 4b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upstream in in the project cycle</li> <li>• Project substance rather and documents</li> <li>• Major projects; non-major in smaller countries; horizontal and pilot projects</li> <li>• Capacity building</li> </ul>	4.3.1 Relevance in meeting the needs of the Member States (EQ 2)

## 4 TECHNICAL ADVISORY SERVICES

This chapter presents the results of the evaluation of JASPERS technical advisory services in the current programming period. The chapter outlines the processes and the portfolio of technical advisory services (section 6.1), the findings by evaluation criteria (section 6.2) and a summary of key findings (section 7.3). Data gaps and limitations on the findings are presented in chapter 2.3. Given similarities and differences between technical advisory services across services, the findings are presented, where relevant, by type of project (i.e. ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF or IPA projects).

### 4.1 Processes of technical advisory services

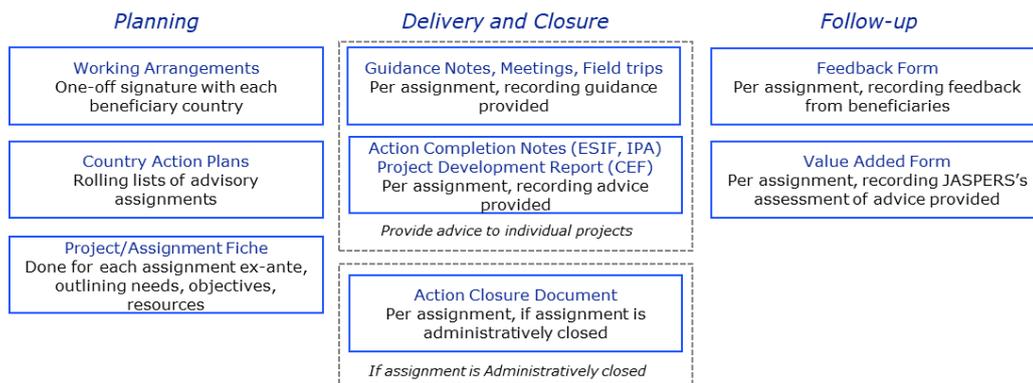
**Technical advisory services** have the overarching objective of ensuring a swift preparation and approval of projects while at the same time ensuring a high level of project quality and project documentation by helping beneficiaries and managing authorities to plan and optimise their projects. Technical advisory services are provided by JASPERS across the three mandates to specific projects, i.e. ESIF major projects, ESIF non-major projects CEF projects, and IPA projects. The overall intervention logic for the JASPERS technical advisory services is presented in section 3.4 above.

JASPERS provided advisory support in the previous programming period (2007–2013) along the lines foreseen in the JASPERS Procedure Manual<sup>40</sup>. In the current programming period (2014–2020), advisory services are provided in line with the working arrangements signed with each of the beneficiary countries as well as with the internal governance documents (JASPERS Quality Manual). The working arrangements for each beneficiary country are adjoined by Country Action Plans which are 'rolling' documents containing lists of projects that require advisory support updated at least on a quarterly basis. The Country Action Plan process was further formalised by JASPERS as of June 2018, particularly as a result of the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors report. Country Action Plans are accompanied by project fiches (from January 2014 to June 2018), and assignment fiches (after June 2018, as per the updated JASPERS Quality Manual). They record basic information and an overview of the scope, timing and resources for each assignment. According to the process the involvement of the European Commission in the process of planning is increased, as the Commission services receive all assignment fiches for tacit approval (5 days). The implementation of the new Country Action Plan process is monitored by the Quality Management Unit.

During the delivery of advisory services, JASPERS records the advice provided to beneficiaries in guidance notes. At the completion of an advisory service JASPERS issues an action completion note (for ESIF, IPA projects) or a project development report (for CEF projects). JASPERS follows-up on the advice provided both internally and externally by collecting feedback from the beneficiaries (feedback form) and making a self-assessment of the value added of the assignment (value added form). If assignments are administratively closed, as per the updated Quality Manual, JASPERS is required to issue an action closure note documenting the reasons for closure. The processes related to the delivery of advisory services under the various mandates are outlined below. A detailed description of the processes is presented in Appendix A.

<sup>40</sup> JASPERS (2010), Procedures Manual, version 1.0

Figure 4-1 Key processes related to JASPERS technical advisory services to projects (simplified)



Source: JASPERS Quality Manual

## 4.2 Portfolio of technical advisory services

Technical advisory services are the core type of services provided by JASPERS. As shown in the portfolio of assignments in the period January 2014–December 2018, 62% (i.e. 678) of all JASPERS assignments concerned technical advisory support to projects, of which 44% (297) were completed, 49% (329) were ongoing and 8% (52 assignments) were administratively closed. Amongst assignments that were completed and ongoing (626 assignments), most were related to advisory services provided by JASPERS related to ESIF major projects (63%) and to a lesser extent non-major projects (21%), IPA projects (11%), and CEF projects (5%) (see Table 4-1). JASPERS predominantly assisted projects in 'traditional' infrastructure sectors such as rail, air and maritime (33% of assisted projects), water and wastewater (29%) and roads (14%). However, the portfolio also shows an increasing level of activity of JASPERS technical advisory services in the 'emerging' sector of smart development (11%).

Table 4-1 Technical advisory services to projects (completed and ongoing assignments by sector) (N=626, January 2014–December 2018)

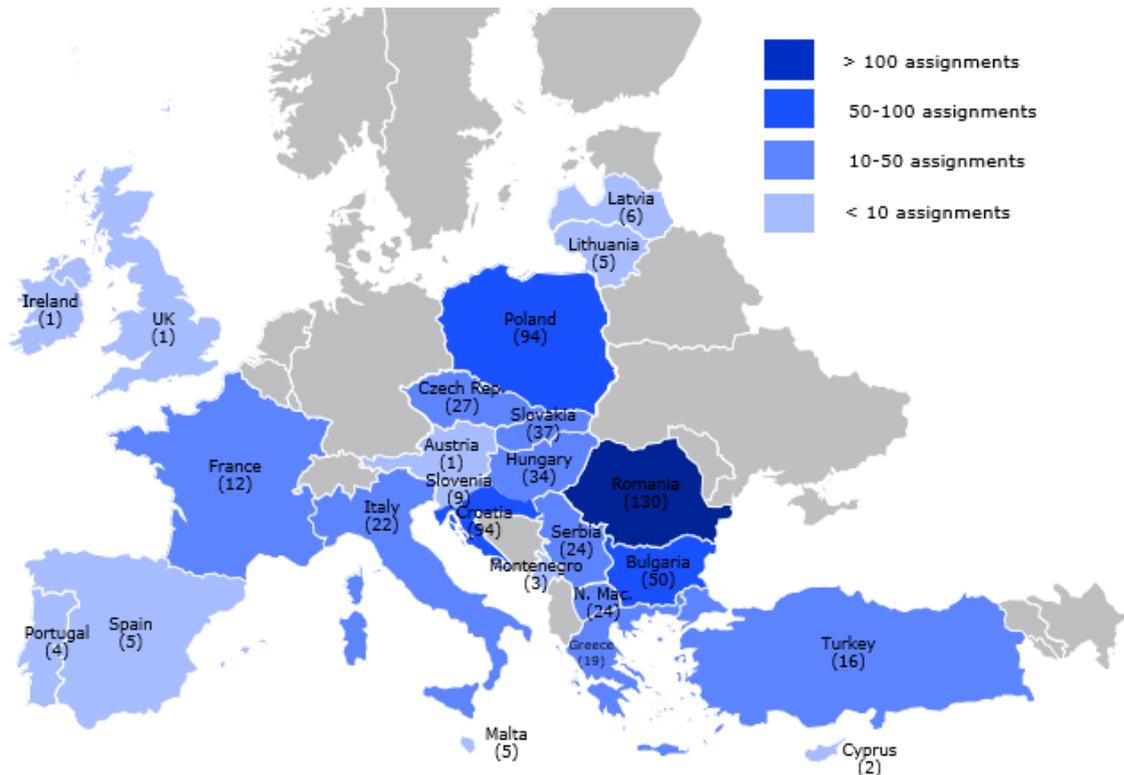
	ESIF major projects		ESIF non-major projects		CEF projects		IPA projects		Total advisory assignments*	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Rail, air and maritime	140	35%	27	20%	28	88%	12	18%	207	33%
Water and wastewater	100	25%	46	35%	-	-	32	48%	178	29%
Roads	66	17%	14	11%	4	12%	4	6%	88	14%
Energy and solid waste	38	10%	16	12%	-	-	19	28%	73	12%
Smart development	40	10%	28	21%	-	-	-	-	68	11%
Public transport	11	3%	1	1%	-	-	-	-	12	2%
Total assisted projects*	395	63%	132	21%	32 <sup>41</sup>	5%	67	11%	626	100%

<sup>41</sup> The number of CEF assignments amounts to 36 for the period analysed. However, 2 assignments related to horizontal and strategy support services and 2 assignments were administratively closed. Thus, they are not counted in this table.

Source: JADE, SFC2014, and CEF-1, CEF-2 Reports extracted as of 2019 (\*) % of the number of completed and ongoing assignments (i.e. 626)

Geographically, JASPERS advisory services were largely delivered in countries that are original beneficiaries of JASPERS services, such as Romania (21% of all completed and ongoing advisory assignments), Poland (15%), Hungary (15%), Bulgaria (8%).

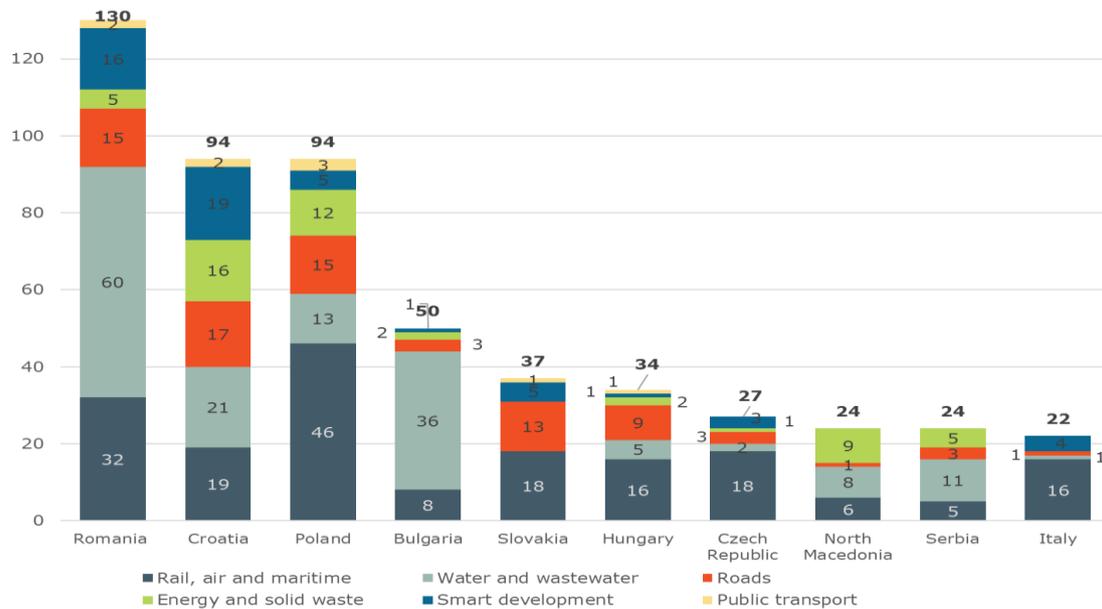
Figure 4-2 Geographical distribution of technical advisory assignments (N = 626, completed and ongoing, January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JADE

JASPERS technical advisory services were distributed across all sectors in the assisted countries with some notable sector concentrations in specific countries. In Romania and Bulgaria, a high proportion of assignments concerned water and wastewater projects. Rail, air and maritime was a key sector of JASPERS assistance in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Italy. Smart development was also one of the key sectors of assistance in Croatia and Romania. Advisory services in the energy and waste sectors were relatively concentrated in a few countries, particularly in Croatia and Poland. In pre-accession countries, advisory services were provided predominantly to projects in the water and wastewater sector in Turkey, Serbia and North Macedonia. In North Macedonia, assistance to energy and waste sector projects was also provided in a significant number of cases. The figure below shows the distribution across sectors in the top 10 countries with the highest number of advisory services. Further details are presented in Appendix A.

Figure 4-3 Distribution of technical advisory services by sector in the top 10 countries in terms of number of advisory assignments (completed and ongoing)



Source: JADE

### 4.3 Assessment of the evaluation criteria

In this section JASPERS technical advisory services are assessed according to the five evaluation criteria. Each criterion is introduced with an explanation of the criterion in relation to the two services.

#### 4.3.1 Relevance of technical advisory services

Relevance concerns the assessment of the relationship between the needs for support of Member States and of the European Commission, and the objectives of JASPERS support. It touches upon aspects of design of the interventions, identifying whether there is a match between the needs identified by JASPERS and the needs of the targeted stakeholders. The relevance of technical advisory services is assessed by analysing two evaluation questions: (EQ 1) To what extent can JASPERS be considered as a relevant tool to improve the quality of preparation and implementation of projects, in particular major projects; and (EQ 2) to what extent is JASPERS responding to Member States' needs. The findings are presented per evaluation question.

#### Relevance of improving the quality of preparation and implementation of projects (EQ 1)

The reviewed needs assessment conducted by JASPERS<sup>42</sup> at the beginning of the programming period, based on input from the Member States and the European Commission, forecasted that at least 7 Member States had 'high' priority needs for support in project preparation in at least one sector. As presented in Table 4-2 below, the countries with the most prominent needs for support in project preparation were Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The identified needs for support varied across the different countries in terms of sectors. A 'high' need for support was forecast in the water and wastewater sector, the roads sector, and the public transport sector. Countries that were expected to 'graduate' (i.e. JASPERS advisory services were expected not to be needed anymore) were Malta, Estonia and Cyprus (for some sectors). This is indicated by 'L' in the table below. In countries such as Italy and Greece the

<sup>42</sup> JASPERS (2011), JASPERS Strategy post-2013 needs assessment and preliminary approach.

needs related predominantly to the administrative, political and legal frameworks and less to project preparation, which is why they were not included in the JASPERS needs assessment table (see below).

Table 4-2 Mapping of needs for support in project preparation identified for the programming period 2014–2020 by Member States, JASPERS and the European Commission

	BG	CY	CZ	EE	HU	LT	LV	MT	PL	RO	SK	SI
Roads	H	L	H	L	H	M	M	M	H	H	H	-
Public transport	H	M	H	L	M	M	M	H	H	H	H	M
Water and wastewater	H	L	M	-	M	M	L	M	M	H	M	M
Flood risk, climate	M	L	M	L	M	M	L	M	H	H	M	H
Solid waste	M	L	M	-	M	M	-	L	H	H	L	L
Energy	M	L	M	M	M	M	M	M	H	M	H	M
Knowledge economy	M	L	M	L	M	M	L	L	H	M	M	M

Legend: High need - H Moderate need - M Low need - L

Source: adapted based on JASPERS Needs Assessment (2011)

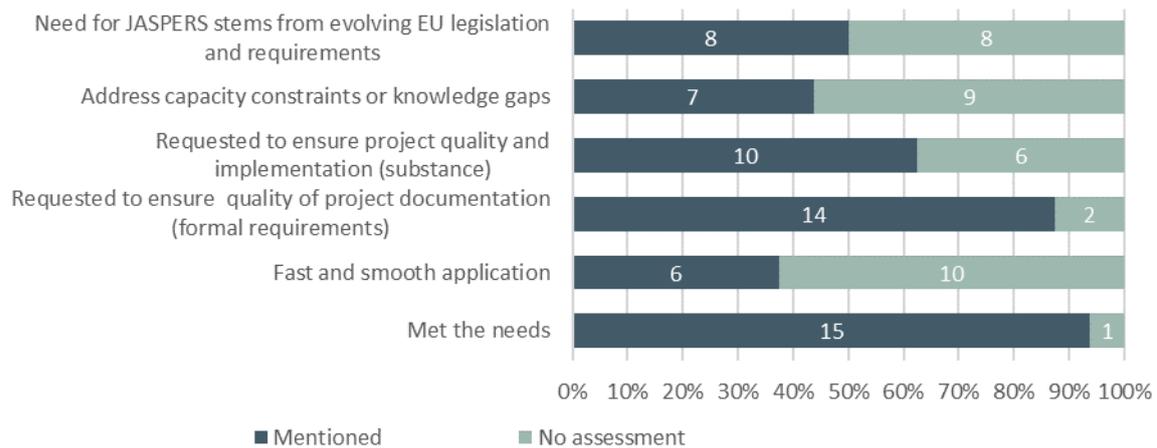
An analysis of the *portfolio* of technical advisory assignments by mandate indicates a high demand for technical advisory services for ESIF major projects. As presented in section 3.2.1, more than half of the major projects (57%, 169) that were submitted to the European Commission by July 2019 were assisted by JASPERS. Under CEF and IPA, this ratio was more modest. For both IPA and CEF projects, the availability of technical assistance from other sources (e.g. IPF for IPA or capacity building for railway infrastructure managers directly allocated to MS) is also likely to contribute to a lower demand for JASPERS services. Only 5% (17 projects) under the IPA projects were assisted by JASPERS and they were concentrated on 3 countries.

Based on the analysis of the portfolio of assignments in terms of sectors and countries, the assignments performed in the period January 2014–December 2018 are found to be reflective of the key needs – both sectoral and country-specific – identified in the pre-programming period needs assessment. As presented above (see section 4.1), roads (178 assignments, 29%) and water and wastewater (88 assignments, 14%) were the sectors with the highest level of advisory services to projects. Technical advisory services were predominantly provided in countries that were identified as high priority in terms of need of assistance, in Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria (see Figure 4-3 above).

Based on an analysis of the assignment documentation (action completion notes, feedback fiches and value-added fiches) in the majority of the *sampled assignments* (14 out of 16 assignments), JASPERS technical advisory was requested to provide support to improve the quality of project documentation. JASPERS was less frequently requested to help with improving the project quality and implementation (10 out of 16 analysed cases). The documentation for CEF assignments shows only one case (out of the total of ten CEF assignments) where support was requested to assist projects with matters related to project quality and implementation, whereas in all cases it was requested to ensure the quality of the documentation. The Slovakia *country fiche* offers a possible explanation for this. According to the stakeholders interviewed, because of the relatively tight deadlines for applications in CEF calls, the extent and depth of support in CEF project applications was limited. This point was also underlined by interviewed managing authorities responsible for

five assignments (out of 16), noting that applications were already quite mature at the stage when JASPERS intervened, and the support was mostly requested to support the preparation of the documentation in view of the short timeline of the call. For IPA technical advisory assignments, where four (out of six assignments) technical advisory was needed to support project quality. This is presented in the Second Interim Report (see section 4.2.2.4 and Appendix A.3.6).

Figure 4-4 Relevance of JASPERS technical advisory services for ESIF major projects as mentioned in the assignment documentation in the sample (N=16<sup>43</sup>)



Source: Assignment documentation. January 2014–December 2018

The managing authorities interviewed referred to support with the quality of documentation in the case of 12 assignments (75% of the sampled assignments), while actual project quality (i.e. substance) was only cited as a reason behind requesting JASPERS support in six cases (38% of assignments).

The *online targeted consultation* confirms that ensuring project quality and improving the quality of project documentation were the key needs addressed by JASPERS technical advisory. More specifically, around 85% of respondents considered JASPERS technical advisory to be relevant (to a very large or large extent) to increasing the quality of projects<sup>44</sup>, while 72% of respondents considered JASPERS technical advisory as relevant (to a very large or large extent) to improving the standards of project documentation<sup>45</sup>. Also, in line with the results from the sampled assignments, the survey results show that in relative terms, the need to speed up the major projects approval process was not considered among the most prominent ones (19% of respondents considered JASPERS technical advisory to be relevant to a limited/very limited extent)<sup>46</sup>. The overall positive assessment of JASPERS support as concerns the relevance of the

<sup>43</sup> The sample of assignments selected for this evaluation includes 18 major project advisory assignments under the ESIF mandate. Two out of these 18 were administratively closed. The assessment is therefore based on the remaining 16 assignments.

<sup>44</sup> Question asked: D1. Based on your experience, to what extent do you think that JASPERS was able to respond to the following needs: Increase the quality of projects. A total of 90 responses out of which 51% to a very large extent, 34% to a large extent, 8% to a limited extent, 8% no opinion.

<sup>45</sup> Question asked: D1. Based on your experience, to what extent do you think that JASPERS was able to respond to the following needs: Improve the standards of project documentation. A total of 90 responses out of which 33% to a very large extent, 39% to a large extent, 8% to a limited extent, 5% to a very limited extent, 16% no opinion.

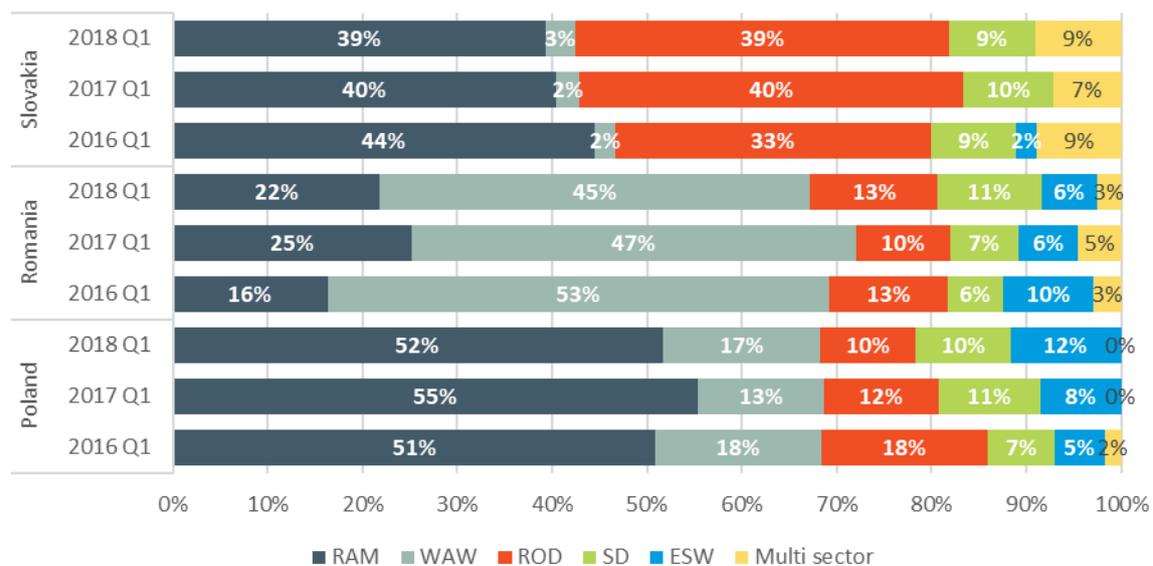
<sup>46</sup> In terms of speeding up the major projects' approval process, the remaining respondents were as follows: 39% claimed JASPERS technical advisory was relevant to a very large extent, 19% claimed it was relevant to a large extent, and 24% had no opinion, or the question was not applicable to them.

need to improve the quality of project documentation was shared among participants in the *seminar* organised as a part of the evaluation.

### Relevance in meeting the needs of the Member States (EQ 2)

JASPERS technical advisory services are found to generally meet the needs of the beneficiaries. JASPERS advisory services are demand-driven and rely on requests from the Member States for support. In the observations section of the 2018 ECA report, the EC and the EIB noted that the Country Action Plans can be considered as de facto needs assessments since the Member States have the opportunity to state their needs for technical advisory services by presenting projects to be included in the Action Plans. While Country Action Plans do not reveal details on why certain actions (JASPERS services) were included, a comparison of the actions listed in the Action Plans, with the needs identified in the post-2013 needs assessment (presented earlier in this section), provides an indication of the extent to which the needs are being addressed. Figure 4-5 presents an overview of the sectoral distribution of projects across the same quarter (Q1) for three different years for the three countries included in the 2013 needs assessment (country fiches). See also the assessment of the JASPERS planning in section 7.2.

Figure 4-5 Sectoral distribution of JASPERS assignments as included in Country Action Plans for selected countries Quarter 1, 2016–2018



Source: Adapted based on JASPERS Country Action Plans, 2016-2018

While there is some variation in the distribution across the three years, the ratios have remained fairly stable in the Action Plans. This implies that the priorities of the respective Member States have not changed significantly over those years (this is further detailed in the Second Interim Report, section 4.1.1).

At the assignment level, the similarities or discrepancies between the needs identified at the start of an assignment and the actual support delivered can shed light on how well the initial assessments reflect the actual needs of the Member States. To that end, the available seven project fiches – produced prior to assignment start – were compared to action completion notes to check to what extent the planned services and the delivered services are the same<sup>47</sup>. In 4 of

<sup>47</sup> One assignment fiche contained no information on the planned JASPERS input, so no judgement can be made.

the analysed assignments, the specific services/need identified at the beginning were delivered with no change in scope. However, for 2 assignments JASPERS technical advisory undertook additional tasks – in one instance JASPERS provided an additional general assessment of the wastewater collection and water supply needs and in the other, the scope was broadened to assess the project at various stages of its development.

Table 4-1 Number of assignment forms for technical advisory where specific needs were identified, by sector and by need (n=10)

Key needs identified in analysed projects	Rail, air and maritime	Water and wastewater	Roads	Energy and solid waste	Smart development
To support the development of the project (concept design)	3 (0)	5 (3)	3 (1)	4 (1)	2 (1)
To support the development of the project application	10 (10)	7 (6)	6 (5)	5 (1)	6 (5)
Fast and smooth approval	4 (4)	2 (2)	4 (3)	1 (1)	2 (1)
To fill in capacity or knowledge constraints	6 (6)	5 (5)	4 (3)	3 (1)	2 (1)

Source: Assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018

Note: Numbers indicate cases where documentary evidence refers to the respective needs, while the numbers in brackets denote assignments where managing authorities also confirmed.

Information collected from the *country fiches*<sup>48</sup> and the 42 *sampled*<sup>49</sup> technical advisory assignments suggests that the delivery of technical advisory is characterised by flexibility and limited detailed forward-looking planning of services. In practice, JASPERS assignments are included in the Country Action Plans and project/assignment fiches, but they can be modified ad-hoc upon request from the beneficiaries in line with emerging needs. Such flexibility can have two implications. On the one hand, JASPERS technical advisory can be modified to adjust to the needs of the beneficiaries throughout the lifecycle of the project preparation (and implementation, if needed). Thereby, the flexibility of the services can enable achievement of the overarching objective of delivering good quality projects. On the other hand, limited documented planning (as presented in the portfolio analysis, only 8% of technical advisory assignments had an assignment/project fiche prepared ex-ante) has implications on the success criteria for the delivery of services and impairs the ability to assess the JASPERS support against the initial needs.

Adding to the findings from the desk research and the sampled assignments, the *online targeted consultation results* show that JASPERS technical advisory services are considered relevant to a very large or large extent in meeting the most pressing needs of managing authorities and project beneficiaries.

<sup>48</sup> Croatia, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, North Macedonia

<sup>49</sup> Including 16 ESIF major (18 in the sample but 2 were administratively closed), 6 ESIF non-major (8 in the sample but 2 were administratively closed), 10 CEF projects (1 was administratively closed but in fact JASPERS completed the assignment), 5 IPA projects (6 in the sample but 1 was administratively closed).

For the sampled assignment of non-major projects (8<sup>50</sup>), JASPERS technical advisory was requested to increase the methodological accuracy of the projects. JASPERS technical advisory was asked to address issues related to improving the project quality and implementation and to administrative capacity constraints (3 assignments). More specifically, these assignments concerned support for developing the CBA methodology (4 assignments), and feasibility studies (2 assignments). In three of these five reviewed assignments, European Commission methodology<sup>51</sup> was not followed by the beneficiaries. JASPERS experts explained that the projects had been developed following national methodologies; but was then assessed by JASPERS following the EC methodologies. This suggests that for non-major projects the approach taken by JASPERS did not fully meet the expectations of national authorities when their projects are driven by national requirements, but rather that of the European Commission guidelines. As a key purpose, JASPERS has to ensure that projects are up to EU standards, so this is an issue of mismatch of expectations rather than lack of relevance.

#### 4.3.2 Effectiveness of technical advisory services

Effectiveness of technical advisory services focuses on assessing the extent to which such services provided by JASPERS to ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects resulted in the achievement of envisaged objectives (as outlined in the intervention logic, see section 3.4).

The evaluation sought to assess both direct and indirect effects arising from JASPERS technical advisory support to projects. In terms of *direct effects*, the effectiveness of JASPERS services was assessed in relation to the achievement of the overall objectives of ensuring swift project preparation, approval and implementation (EQ 6) (see section 4.3.2.1), as well as improving project documentation (EQ 7) and the quality of projects (EQ 9 and EQ 5) (see section 4.3.2.2). Furthermore, the analysis investigates whether a trade-off between the dual objectives of ensuring high quality projects and ensuring swift project approval (EQ 8) can be observed (see section 4.3.2.3). In terms of *indirect effects*, the evaluation assesses the extent to which the JASPERS advisory services have an effect on building the administrative capacity of beneficiaries (EQ 11) (see section 4.3.2.4).

##### 4.3.2.1 Effect on the timeline of assisted projects

As presented in the intervention logic (see section 3.4 above), one of the key operational objectives of technical advisory services is to improve the timeline of preparation and approval of projects, thus enabling a timely implementation of projects (EQ 6). The following sections present the key findings related to the effect that advisory services provided by JASPERS had on the timelines of ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects. Given the differences in terms of the potential for an effect on the timeline of the different types of projects, these are dealt with separately in the following section.

##### **Effect on timeline of ESIF major projects (EQ 6)**

The evaluation finds mixed evidence related to the effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline of [preparation of ESIF major projects](#). The analysis of the *portfolio of assignments* provided an indication of the involvement of JASPERS in the preparation of projects which for the current programming period was on average 809 days (see Appendix B on portfolio analysis, section

<sup>50</sup> Out of which two were administratively closed, and one cancelled

<sup>51</sup> CBA (screening process and selection of the preferred option using a least cost analysis for the entire regional system; assessing benefits; and calculating the funding gap rate)

B.4.1)<sup>52</sup>. However, the data on the duration of JASPERS involvement in assisting ESIF major projects has inherent limitations when it comes to ascertaining whether JASPERS had an effect on the timeline of preparation of projects. Data on the duration of preparation of projects (from concept design up to application) which could be compared with the duration of JASPERS involvement to assess the magnitude of a potential effect on the timeline was not available in the JADE database and had to be harvested from the SFC2014 database (i.e. from versions of the Application Form, section H on timetable). Given that this data could not be automatically extracted at assignment level, the data was harvested manually for a sample of projects.

The data for the *sample of 16 ESIF major projects* that benefited from advisory support were used to make a comparison between the timeline of JASPERS advisory services and the timeline of preparation of the major projects to determine whether quantifiable effects/changes in the timeline of preparation can be observed and whether these can be attributed to JASPERS. Specifically, a comparison of the initial timeline of different phases of project preparation in the first application form submitted was compared to the timeline of different phases of project preparation in the final application form submitted in SFC2014. This was then correlated with the data collected from the assignment documentation in terms of the areas assisted by JASPERS and compared to the timing of the JASPERS involvement.

Increases in the duration/timeline of phases of preparation of the analysed major projects across application forms were found in 18% of the cases (3 major projects) (see Table 4-3). There was no case where quantifiable effects of decreases in the duration of phases of preparation of the analysed major projects were found. For the 3 major projects (in Romania, Poland and Hungary and covering different sectors), the type of involvement and the timing of the JASPERS support recorded in assignment documentation (action completion notes) was compared to the changes observed in the timeline of preparation of the project. The changes in the timeline could be partly attributed to JASPERS in only 1 of the 3 cases:

- In the Romanian case, qualitative data analysis from the assignment documentation enabled the attribution of the increase in timeline of the CBA phase to JASPERS advisory support. More precisely, critical issues related to the CBA analysis were not highlighted by JASPERS during the advisory stage, but they led to the interruption of the major project application by the European Commission. However, according to interviews with JASPERS, other factors also contributed to the delays, in particular changes to the Romanian national rules concerning CBA which took place after the advisory services had been concluded. All things considered, the delay can be attributed at least partly to JASPERS as the issues remained unresolved after the first interruption of the project and the project was then interrupted a second time by the European Commission.
- In the Greek case, the beneficiary initially did not intend to submit a full feasibility study and JASPERS advisory support helped align the project application with EU requirements. However, the need to develop a full feasibility study as advised by JASPERS led to a longer timeline of preparation of the project than initially expected by the beneficiary (as confirmed during interviews). In this case, the change in the timeline needs to be contextualised as the project

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<sup>52</sup> In the previous programming period 2007–2013 the average involvement of JASPERS in assignments was 320 days longer (see AECOM (2012), JASPERS Evaluation Final Report). Nevertheless, the data for the two periods is not fully comparable at this stage as the previous evaluation covering the 2007–2013 programming period accounted for the full programming period, whereas the analysis as part of this evaluation for the 2014–2020 programming period only covers the period January 2014–December 2018.

would not have been approved without a full feasibility study, which could have led to even further delays. However, the delay cannot be attributed to JASPERS.

- In the Hungarian case, the extended timeline of project preparation cannot be attributed to JASPERS advisory support as the main reason for this was related to national Hungarian procedures (e.g. environmental permit requirements). Thus, the delay cannot be attributed to JASPERS.

Table 4-3 ESIF major projects with a change in the timeline of different phases (comparison first application versus last application) (N=3, sample of 16 ESIF major projects)

Phase	Change in timeline of preparation (in days, delay)		
	Project 1 (RO)	Project 2 (EL)	Project 3 (HU)
Feasibility study/business plan	-	303	-
Cost-benefit analysis	453	371	-
Environmental impact assessment	-	-	2,505
Design study	-	-	377
Preparation of tender documentation	-	-	183
Tender procedure	669	228	-

Source: SFC2014, extracted in 2019

The perception of beneficiaries and managing authorities consulted in *interviews* for the sample of 16 technical advisory assignments for ESIF major projects was mixed. Beneficiaries covering 4 assignments (out of the 7 where a response was given) and managing authorities covering 5 assignments (out of 10 where a response was given) considered JASPERS to have had a negative effect on the timeline of preparation of their projects, meaning that the JASPERS involvement led to a slower preparation of the projects. However, beneficiaries and managing authorities agreed that the slower preparation also led to improvements in the quality of the projects. Only 1 beneficiary and 1 managing authority considered JASPERS to have led to faster preparation of the projects. In contrast, a large share of respondents (64%, 135 respondents) to the *online targeted consultation* assessed that JASPERS had a decisive or significant effect in terms of ensuring faster project preparation, whereas only 21% (44 respondents) assessed JASPERS had a limited or negative effect on the timeline of project preparation (i.e. in terms of delays)<sup>53</sup>.

The evaluation finds data pointing to a positive effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline of [approval of ESIF major projects](#) in the current programming period. This finding is supported by the shorter overall timeline from submission to approval<sup>54</sup> and shorter timelines for interruptions of JASPERS-assisted ESIF major projects as compared to non-assisted major projects in the

<sup>53</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: faster project preparation. A total of 210 responses, of which 21% decisive, 43% significant, 17% limited, 6% neutral, 4% negative, 10% no opinion.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the evaluation differentiates between 'overall approval timeline' / 'decision timeline' / 'approval and appraisal timeline' (same meaning) understood to mean the full timeline of ESIF major projects from submission to interruption including appraisal, interruptions or incomplete submissions (as applicable). This is different from the 'regulatory approval timeline' understood to mean the European Commission decision-making timeline.

current programming period. The analysis related to the duration of the JASPERS involvement in the preparation of projects compared to the overall timeline of approval of projects does not point to a clear-cut finding on the effect of early or late involvement of JASPERS advisory on the approval timelines. These findings are further elaborated in the following.

First, the evaluation assessed whether major differences are noted in terms of overall timeline of approval of JASPERS advisory-assisted major projects as compared to non-assisted projects. In this regard, the evaluation finds that on average JASPERS-assisted ESIF major projects tend to have a shorter overall appraisal and approval timeline from first submission to approval than those that were not assisted. JASPERS-assisted major projects undergoing independent quality review were approved on average within 198 days<sup>55</sup>, i.e. 85 days faster than non-assisted projects. Similarly, JASPERS-assisted major projects undergoing post-submission appraisal were approved on average within 133 days, i.e. 15 days faster than non-assisted projects<sup>56</sup>. In the case of major projects undergoing post-submission appraisal, the portfolio included 77 major projects in Poland. Poland is one of the key recipients of JASPERS support and the national capacity for project preparation has increased significantly as a result of JASPERS support. If the Polish projects are excluded from the sample, then the average duration from submission of the project to adoption under Article 102.2 increases to 160 days (for assisted) and 400 (for non-assisted) (see Table 4-4). Thus, the evidence from the portfolio indicates that JASPERS advisory support has contributed to a decrease in the timeline of overall approval timeline of major projects.

Second, interruptions from the European Commission can also affect the approval timeline of ESIF major projects submitted that undergo post-submission appraisal by JASPERS. Interruptions can arise due to the poor quality of the projects or project applications. Similarly, comparing the duration of assisted major projects with non-assisted projects can be an indication of the effect that JASPERS advisory has on the timeline of projects that it supports. Amongst the 41 major projects (of portfolios that were interrupted, 28 were assisted and 13 were not assisted by JASPERS advisory), the average duration of interruptions for assisted projects was shorter by 34 days as compared to the duration of interruptions for non-assisted projects in the portfolio (see Table 4-4). The shorter timeline for interrupted projects that were assisted by JASPERS is interpreted in the context of this evaluation as an indication that JASPERS advisory contributes to the swift remediation of issues raised during the Commission decision-making process. However, the analysis shows a few projects (4) where, despite support from JASPERS advisory, the beneficiary and the national authorities needed more than 3 months to address the comments. Three of these projects were in Slovakia and one in Romania and covered the rail, air and maritime sector, water and wastewater, and public transport.

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<sup>55</sup> From submission to IQR to tacit approval under Article 102.1 with independent quality review, including incomplete submissions.

<sup>56</sup> From submission to European Commission to adoption under Article 102.2 with post-submission appraisal including interruptions.

Table 4-4 Duration of approval of ESIF major projects January 2007–December 2013

	Average days overall approval timeline from submission to approval (*)	Average days regulatory approval <sup>1</sup> (excluding interruptions/ <sup>2</sup> including interruptions)	Average days interruption	Number of projects
Assisted	-	206 <sup>1</sup> / 367 <sup>2</sup>	-	373
Non-assisted	-	257 <sup>1</sup> / 468 <sup>2</sup>	-	344
All projects	-	232 <sup>1</sup> / 428 <sup>2</sup>	-	717

Source: DG REGIO 2007-2013 data extracted in 2019

Table 4-5 Duration of approval of ESIF major projects January 2014–December 2018

	Average days overall approval timeline from submission to approval (*)	Average days regulatory approval <sup>1</sup> (excluding interruptions/ <sup>2</sup> including interruptions)	Average days interruption	Number of projects
<b>Programming period 2014-2020 (Article 102.1)</b>				
Assisted (Art. 102.1)	198	89	-	42
Not assisted (Art. 102.1)	283	76 <sup>57</sup>	-	12
All Article 102.1 projects	216	86	-	54
<b>Programming period 2014–2020 (Article 102.2)</b>				
Assisted (Art. 102.2)	133 <sup>58</sup>	98	77	77 (28 interrupt)
Not assisted (Art. 102.2)	148 <sup>59</sup>	104	111	49 (13 interrupt)
All Article 102.2 projects	139	100	86	126 (41 interrupt)

Source: SFC2014 extracted in 2019; all ESIF major projects submitted from January 2014 to July 2019 with their status as of November 2019

Note: (\*) Also called 'decision timeline'/'overall approval timeline'. Note that the days are calculated by the evaluation team based on dates manually collected from SFC2014 and a methodology agreed with DG REGIO to capture the full timeline of projects. This is further explained in Appendix B. For Article 102.1 the submission to approval timeline accounts for the total timeline of the projects (from request for IQR to tacit approval) including the duration of the review services under IQR,

<sup>57</sup> This includes 3 outliers. Three projects were approved within 35, 36 and 15 days. If these are removed from the calculations, the average is 92.

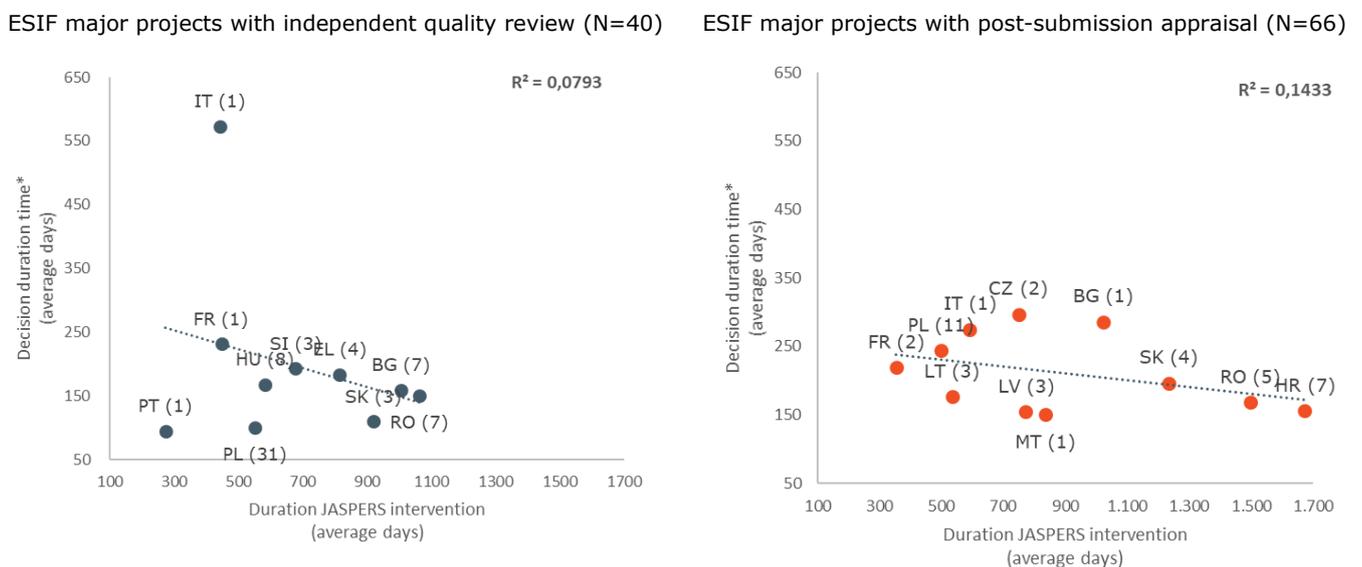
<sup>58</sup> This value would be 160 if Poland projects (34 projects) were excluded from the sample.

<sup>59</sup> This value would be 400 if Poland projects (43 projects) were excluded from the sample.

incomplete submission and the duration taken by the EC for approval. For Article 102.2, the submission to approval timeline accounts for the total timeline of the projects (from first submission to EC to adoption) including withdrawals, interruptions, incomplete submission and time taken by the EC for decision.

Third, the evaluation also tested whether the duration of JASPERS involvement has an effect on the overall timeline of approval of projects. This was done assuming that, in principle, a longer duration of involvement (thus, earlier involvement by JASPERS) should lead to a better prepared project and a swifter approval timeline of the project (shorter decision timeline). As shown in Figure 4-6 below, the analysis is inconclusive in relation to the hypothesis that a longer duration of JASPERS support is correlated with a shorter duration of approval. The lack of a clear conclusion can be attributed to a number of factors. One explanatory factor is that the duration of involvement of JASPERS as recorded in JADE is not a reliable measure of level of effort or of the actual stage of intervention of JASPERS<sup>60</sup>. However, data concerning the level of effort and actual stage of intervention was not available at the portfolio level and would require a systematic analysis of each of the assignments (e.g. through documentary review). Other explanatory factors for the lack of a statistically significant correlation is the fact that overall approval timelines of major projects can be affected by a variety of other confounding variables (e.g. capacity of beneficiaries and managing authorities to prepare projects, the level of maturity of the project). Accounting for such factors would provide a more accurate picture of the actual effect of JASPERS on the timeline of approval of major projects as compared to other possible factors. However, this constitutes a limitation given that such data is not available at the level of the portfolio and the in-depth analysis performed as part of the sample of assignments covered only a small proportion of the portfolio (16 ESIF major projects).

Figure 4-6 Average duration (days) of JASPERS intervention and average duration (days) of approval timeline for assisted ESIF major projects (number of projects indicated in parentheses)<sup>61</sup>



Source: Authors, based on SFC2014 and JADE extracted in 2019

Source: Authors, based on SFC2014 and JADE extracted in 2019

<sup>60</sup> The JADE database only records the date when the assignment was open and closed. However, as explained by JASPERS in interviews, some assignments can be open for a long period of time with limited activity/involvement of JASPERS staff.

<sup>61</sup> Note that the major projects undergoing post-submission appraisal are presented separately from the major projects undergoing independent quality review for the purpose of clarity and to ease comparability.

Note: There was a total of 42 assisted ESIF major projects in the portfolio but data on the JASPERS intervention was not available for 2 ESIF major projects.

Decision duration = time elapsed from notification of the project to IQR to tacit approval (including IQR process, incomplete submissions)

Note: There was a total of 77 assisted ESIF major projects in the portfolio but data on the JASPERS intervention was not available for 11 ESIF major projects.

Decision duration = time elapsed from submission of project to the EC to adoption (including interruptions, incomplete submissions)

European institutions, including the European Commission<sup>62</sup> and the European Court of Auditors, have expressed concerns that the time needed to appraise and approve projects in the previous programming period (2007–2013) was too long. The European Commission Internal Audit Service report highlighted a significant backlog in the approval of major projects in the previous programming period, which ultimately resulted in delays in the implementation of projects. The current evaluation finds that the European Commission's regulatory timelines for approval of projects are generally in line with the regulatory requirements (although major projects with post-submission appraisal have an average duration that is 10 days longer than the 90-day regulatory timeline for European Commission decisions) (see Table 4-4, Table 4-5). Furthermore, the evaluation finds that both the regulatory Commission approval timelines as well as the timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects in the current programming period are shorter as compared to the previous programming period (see Table 4-4, Table 4-5). These findings are interpreted as an indication of improvements to the appraisal and approval processes for the current programming period.

The reduction in the regulatory approval timelines and the timelines from submission to approval of projects (including appraisal) in the current programming period can be attributed partly to the requirements in the regulatory basis (i.e. particularly the 90-day Commission decision timeline, the 30-day post-submission appraisal process and the new Omnibus Regulation timeline of 180 days for independent quality review as of August 2018). However, the reduction in the timelines is also explained by the reduced number of interruptions of major projects in the current programming period. As compared to the 2007–2013 programming period, when 82% of submitted major projects were interrupted<sup>63</sup>, only 22% of major projects in the current programming period were interrupted. This is mainly due to the introduction of the independent quality review (pre-submission appraisal) procedure which does not allow for interruptions of major projects. However, given that, as elaborated below (see section 4.3.2.2), major projects that are assisted by JASPERS advisory have fewer interruptions on average (see Table 4-8) and have lower average fewer numbers of critical issues (see Table 6-5), the data also points to the fact that the intervention of JASPERS advisory can have a positive effect on the timeline of approval of major projects, thus paving the way for a smoother approval.

The *interviews* with the beneficiaries and managing authorities concerning the effect of JASPERS on the timeline of approval of projects for the sample of 16 assignments present a more mixed picture. Specifically, amongst the beneficiaries covering 8 (of the 16) assignments where a response was provided, 4 considered JASPERS to have a positive effect on the timeline of approval whereas 3 considered it to have a negative effect and 1 did not make an assessment. Similarly, amongst the managing authorities covering 16 assignments, the assessment of 6 was that JASPERS had a positive effect whereas 3 considered it had a negative effect and 7 assessed that it had no effect or made no assessment.

<sup>62</sup> Final Audit Report on Major Projects in DG REGIO, 4 October 2017.

<sup>63</sup> AECOM (2012), Evaluation of JASPERS.

In contrast, the findings from the *online targeted consultation* give a clearer picture and support the finding that JASPERS had a positive effect on timeline of approval of major projects. Specifically, the majority of the respondents (65%) considered JASPERS to have a significant or decisive effect on a faster approval of their projects whereas only 17% considered the JASPERS advisory intervention to have a limited or negative effect<sup>64</sup>. However, both the assessment made in the interviews and in the online targeted consultation needs to be caveated as the interpretation of effect on the timeline can have different connotations for different respondents. In this respect, the majority of the stakeholders perceived that a shorter timeline also meant (in some cases) that the project had been subject to no interruptions.

Finally, the evaluation set out to assess whether the intervention of JASPERS advisory had an effect on the **timeline of implementation** of ESIF major projects. Since many of the projects in the portfolio have entered into the implementation stage only recently (65% of ESIF 'new', i.e. Article 102.2 and Article 102.1 major projects in the portfolio were approved in 2018, 2019), the effects of JASPERS (if any) are difficult to quantify at this stage. Thus, the assessment of the effects on the implementation timeline primarily relies on stakeholder assessments. *Interviews* with beneficiaries and managing authorities covering 16 of the sampled technical advisory ESIF major projects assignments suggest that JASPERS advisory is perceived by stakeholders as having no effect on the timeline of implementation of projects. Amongst the 8 beneficiaries assessing the impact of implementation of advisory, 5 considered the involvement of JASPERS advisory had no effect, whereas 1 beneficiary assessed that it had a positive effect whereas 2 beneficiaries assessed it had a negative effect. Similarly, amongst the managing authorities covering the 16 assignments, 7 assessed JASPERS had no effect, 2 considered it had a positive effect and 1 considered it had a negative effect. The *online targeted consultation* results depict a mixed picture concerning the effect of JASPERS on the timeline of implementation of projects. While 35% of respondents considered JASPERS to lead to faster implementation of projects, another 26% assessed JASPERS advisory to have a negative effect on the timeline of implementation of projects<sup>65</sup>.

To sum up, the evaluation finds mixed evidence in relation to the effect of technical advisory services on the timeline of ESIF major projects. The findings are inconclusive as to the effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline or preparation and implementation of projects as different pieces of data point to different types and scale of effect. At the same time, the evaluation finds evidence from the portfolio, online targeted consultation and interviews of a positive effect on the timeline of approval of projects. Specifically, the evaluation finds that the timeline of approval and appraisal and the duration of interruptions of assisted projects are on average shorter than the timeline from submission to approval and the duration of interruptions for non-assisted projects. This is interpreted as an indication of positive effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline.

### **Effect on timeline of ESIF non-major projects (EQ 6)**

The evaluation finds limited and mixed evidence when it comes to the effect of JASPERS support on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of ESIF non-major projects. The *portfolio analysis* indicates that the average duration of JASPERS advisory support in the current

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<sup>64</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: faster project approval. A total of 210 responses, of which 30% decisive, 35% significant, 15% limited, 8% neutral, 2% negative, 10% no opinion.

<sup>65</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: faster project implementation. A total of 210 responses, of which 11% decisive, 23% significant, 25% limited, 15% neutral, 1% negative, 24% no opinion.

programming period was 651 days<sup>66</sup>. The JASPERS involvement varied depending on the sector covered, ranging from 447 days (rail, air and maritime) to 735 days (roads) and, depending on the country, from 107 days (Portugal) to 1,728 days (Slovakia). Similar to ESIF major projects, the duration of JASPERS involvement is not sufficient to provide an indication of the effect that JASPERS advisory has on the timeline of preparation of projects. Data at portfolio level for the precise duration of project preparation of ESIF non-major projects is not available, as such data can only be collected, if at all, at national level.

Thus, as part of the analysis in the *country fiches*, a request for data concerning the timeline of project preparation of ESIF non-major projects was made in the 4 selected countries (Croatia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia) where support from JASPERS advisory was provided to non-major projects. Data was received from Croatia and Slovakia. For Slovakia, there were only 2 non-major projects in the portfolio and, for one, the advisory assignment was ongoing. For the other assignment, JASPERS assisted for a period of almost 5 years. For Croatia, as presented in Table 4-6, the average duration of involvement of JASPERS in 26 non-major projects assisted (out of 46 in the full portfolio) by JASPERS was 1,136 days (3.1 years) out of the total average duration of project preparation of 1,294 days (3.5 years). The projects with the longest duration in terms of JASPERS advisory support (relative to the full duration of project preparation) were in the energy and solid waste, roads, and rail, air and maritime sectors. Notably, the average duration of intervention of JASPERS in the roads sector was limited: only 156 days compared to the average duration of project preparation in the sector (1,204 days).

Table 4-6 Croatia non-major projects duration of JASPERS intervention compared to duration of project preparation (N=26)

Sectors	Duration of JASPERS intervention	Duration of project preparation	Number of projects
Energy and solid waste	1,326	1,543	2
Public transport	1,220	1,233	1
Rail, air, maritime	849	1,071	5
Roads	156	1,204	2
Smart development	1,049	1,062	9
Water and wastewater	1,515	1,716	7
Overall	1,136	1,294	26

Source: Data provided by the Croatian managing authority via email, 2019

However, the quantitative data collected does not provide a clear picture of the effect of JASPERS on the timeline of non-major projects and given that it only covers one country it cannot be generalised at the level of the full portfolio. The assessment was further complemented with data

<sup>66</sup> Similarly, to ESIF major projects, there is an increase in the overall duration of involvement of JASPERS in the planning of non-major projects when compared to the previous programming period (2007–2013). More precisely, in the current programming period, the duration of JASPERS advisory support tended to be longer by approximately 100 days (594 days on average in the 2007–2013 programming period as per the AECOM (2012), Evaluation of JASPERS). However, as previously mentioned, the figures of the current programming period are not fully comparable to those in the previous programming period as the current period only covers data up to 2018.

from interviews performed for the sample of non-major projects. The *interviews* with the beneficiaries and managing authorities in the context of the sample of assignments presented a mixed picture. Amongst the 3 beneficiaries that made an assessment, 1 considered JASPERS had a negative effect on the timeline of preparation and approval of the project, 1 considered it had no effect and the last made no assessment. Amongst the 3 managing authorities that made an assessment, 1 assessed that JASPERS increased the amount of time needed to prepare the project but helped the approval timeline whereas 2 considered it had no effect.

Thus, given the data limitations, the quantitative data collected on the effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline of non-major projects does not point to a clear conclusion and cannot be generalised at the level of the portfolio. Furthermore, the evidence from the stakeholder interviews is diverse and, similarly, does not point to a clear finding on the effect of JASPERS on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of projects.

### **Effect on timeline of CEF and IPA projects (EQ 6)**

For CEF projects, the evaluation similarly focussed on assessing whether JASPERS advisory had an effect on the timeline of preparation of projects. According to the data contained in the JADE database<sup>67</sup>, JASPERS predominantly intervened at the feasibility stage (70% of assignments) and was involved, on average across the *portfolio* of CEF assignments, for 290 days in the preparation of projects. However, an in-depth analysis of the *sample of 10 CEF assignments* indicates that JASPERS intervened at feasibility and application stage in equal proportions (5 assignments at feasibility stage and 5 assignments at application stage) but the information coded in JADE does not accurately depict the situation. In cases where JASPERS intervenes only at the application stage, the extent to which it can influence the timeline of preparation of projects is reduced. For the sample of selected assignments, based on estimates collected from documentary review and data from national stakeholders, the average duration of the preparation of a CEF project was approximately 4 years (i.e. 47 months)<sup>68</sup>, whereas the technical advisory support intervention in the project preparation stage was on average 461 days (i.e. 15 months). However, the assignment forms did not elicit quantifiable evidence of an effect of JASPERS on the timeline of CEF projects beyond the assessments provided by stakeholders. *Interviews* with beneficiaries and managing authorities in the context of the sample of assignments suggest that their perception is that JASPERS had no effect on the timeline of preparation of CEF projects (3 out of 5 beneficiaries, and 4 out of 6 managing authorities assessed no effect).

Under the CEF mandate, JASPERS has no potential to have a direct effect on the timeline of approval of projects. Submission of CEF project applications are determined by fixed deadlines in the competitive calls set by the European Commission and INEA<sup>69</sup>. On average, the duration from submission (deadline of the call) to selection for financing (decision on selection date) is 150 days as foreseen in the Financial Regulation and Financial Decision implementing CEF<sup>70</sup>. Once the application phase is closed, there is a period of 184 days from call closure to the CEF Committee Decision and the time to grant is 276 days from CEF Committee Decision to Grant Agreement signature (based on data on timelines provided by DG MOVE). Given the tight processes surrounding the CEF calls, there is limited possibility for JASPERS to affect the timeline of projects

<sup>67</sup> Note that the CEF Reports for CEF 1 and 2 used for the portfolio analysis did not contain information on the duration of CEF assignments and the JADE database was used for the purpose of this analysis.

<sup>68</sup> Calculated for 9 CEF projects based on estimated time of start of the project preparation.

<sup>69</sup> Innovation and Networks Executive Agency responsible for technical and financial CEF implementation.

<sup>70</sup> The analysis is based on online data from INEA's webpage on the deadline for the CEF Calls for proposals and the decision dates. For the 10 CEF projects, 1 project was submitted under the CEF Call for Proposals 2014, 8 were submitted under the CEF Call for Proposals 2015 and 1 was submitted under the CEF Call for Proposals 2016.

and the effect is mostly related to ensuring that the project applications are submitted within the deadline for call for proposals and in good quality. *Interviews* with managing authorities and beneficiaries, in contrast, suggest that the perception of stakeholders is that JASPERS had a positive effect on the timeline of their projects. However, this was explained as meaning that the involvement of JASPERS and support in fine-tuning the application enabled the beneficiaries to submit the application within the deadline foreseen by the CEF Calls for proposals.

With regard to the effect of JASPERS support for the implementation of CEF projects, amongst the 10 advisory assignments related to CEF projects analysed in the sample, there is some evidence that JASPERS has an effect on the timeline of implementation of projects. More specifically, in the case of one CEF project, the advice provided by JASPERS in the implementation of the project led to an improvement in the quality of the procurement documentation, which then shortened the time for approval of the tender documentation by the relevant national authorities (4 months compared to up to 2 years to get an approval on similar procedures). This was confirmed in the *interviews* with the beneficiaries and managing authority.

For IPA projects, the average duration of JASPERS advisory assignments was 681 days. However, given the lack of a benchmark and no available information on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of projects, the assessment was made on the basis of the stakeholder interviews. The interviews present a mixed picture. 2 beneficiaries considered that JASPERS had a negative effect on the timeline of approval of their IPA projects, meaning that the JASPERS intervention led to a prolonged timeline. In contrast, another 2 beneficiaries considered that the JASPERS intervention had a positive effect on the timeline, leading to a quicker preparation for submission of the project. To exemplify, in a project concerning the construction of a carriageway express road, JASPERS advisory assisted the authorities for 2.5 years with several meetings taking place between JASPERS and the authorities. The authorities interviewed indicated that the intervention of JASPERS advisory had a positive effect on the timeline of preparation and approval of the project. Although concrete dates were not provided, the authorities interviewed explained that projects that were not assisted by JASPERS had difficulties in obtaining a swift approval. In contrast, this particular project was approved within 5 months after submission to the European Commission.

To sum up, for both CEF and IPA, the data collected does not point to a clear conclusion with respect to the effect of JASPERS on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of projects. In the case of CEF, the evaluation concludes that JASPERS advisory has limited potential to affect the timeline of approval of CEF projects due to the stringent processes applicable for such projects.

#### 4.3.2.2 Effect on quality of project documentation and on the quality of projects

One of the operational objectives of JASPERS advisory is to support beneficiaries and managing authorities in improving the maturity of projects and ensuring that they comply with the standards of quality requested by the European Commission (see section 3.4). Given the interlinkages between the effects on the quality and standard of project documentation (EQ7) and the effects on the quality of projects (EQ 9) this section addresses both evaluation questions. The section presents the assessment of the effect of JASPERS advisory on quality of project documentation and on the quality of the project cutting across all types of projects, including ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects.

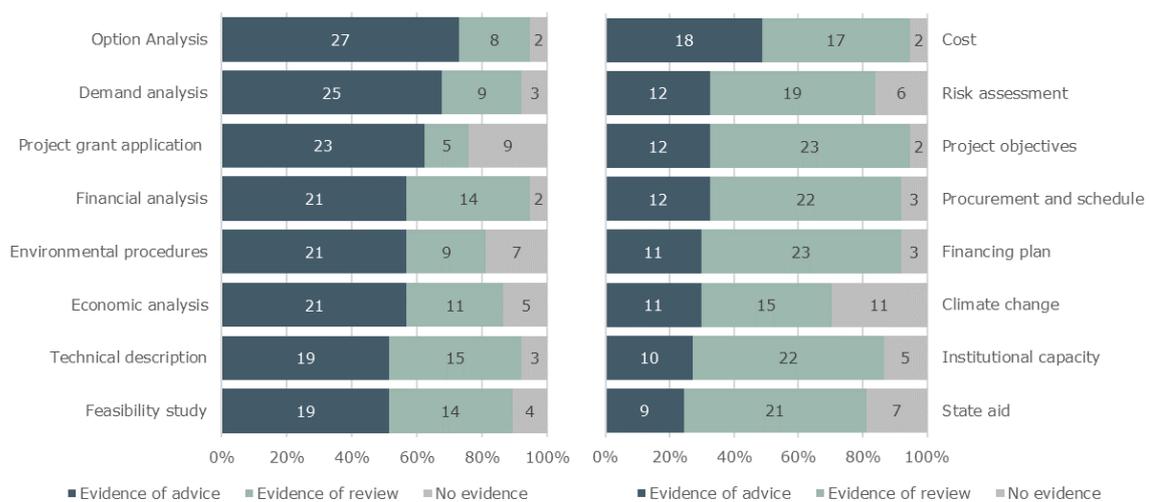
#### **Effect on quality of project documentation and coverage of JASPERS advice (EQ 7)**

JASPERS support is found to be comprehensive in assisting ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects (i.e. covering a wide set of issues and aspects related to the project preparation and

project documentation preparation). The analysis is based on documentation of technical advisory assignments (including guidance notes and action completion notes) for the *sampled projects* supported by JASPERS technical advisory (37 completed projects in total, including 16 ESIF major, 6 ESIF non-major, 5 IPA and 10 CEF projects).

The findings indicate that at an overall level, JASPERS support for projects has been comprehensive in terms of providing advice and review<sup>71</sup>. As presented in Figure 4-7 below, JASPERS provided concrete recommendations for improvement in the majority of analysed projects concerning option analysis (72% of projects), demand analysis (67% of projects), project grant application support (62% of projects), financial analysis, environmental procedures, and economic analysis (56% of projects). The evaluation finds that, in such projects, JASPERS was involved at an early stage in the project preparation and could, thus, provide comprehensive advice on improvements to be made. In contrast, across the sample of 37 analysed projects, JASPERS only reviewed (i.e. checked the project documentation but did not provide concrete recommendations) aspects related to state aid (56% of projects), institutional capacity (59% of projects), climate change (40%), financing plan and project objectives (62%), and procurement and schedule (59%). A detailed presentation of the findings related to the areas covered by JASPERS is presented in the Second Interim Report (section 4.2.2.1).

Figure 4-7 Number of projects where evidence of advice or review was found in 16 specific areas (N=37\*)



Source: Comprehensive assignment documentation (e.g. action completion notes, guidance notes), January 2014–December 2018

Note:

\*5 assignments were administratively closed (note that there are 6 administratively closed assignments according to JADE. However, the analysis highlighted that 1 assignment had in fact been completed and support had been provided. As such, it is integrated in the analysis of completed assignments)

**Review** – JASPERS **only reviewed** the aspects of documentation (meaning that it checked the project documentation but provided no concrete advice or recommendations on further improvements)

**Advice** – JASPERS reviewed **and provided concrete recommendations** on improving the sections of the documentation

<sup>71</sup> The evaluation defines 'advice' as cases where JASPERS reviewed the project and provided concrete recommendations on improving the sections of the documentation. The evaluation defines 'review' as cases where JASPERS only reviewed aspects of the project documentation (meaning that it checked the project documentation but provided no concrete advice or recommendations on further improvements).

The finding that JASPERS advisory had an impact on the quality of the project documentation was also confirmed in the *interviews* with beneficiaries and managing authorities in the context of the sample of assignments as well as in the results of the *online targeted consultation*. Specifically, across the 37 advisory assignments covering ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects, an assessment of the advisory effect on the quality of the project documentation was made in interviews with managing authorities covering 28 assignments and beneficiaries covering 24 assignments. Managing authorities covering 82% of the 28 assignments where a response was provided and beneficiaries covering 91% of assignments where a response was provided assessed that JASPERS had a positive effect on the quality of the project documentation in terms of improving the presentation of the project in the project documentation and in terms of ensuring compliance with EU requirements. This perception is further confirmed by the evidence collected from the *online targeted consultation*. The majority of respondents (78%) indicated that JASPERS had a significant effect on improving the quality of the project documentation<sup>72</sup>. Furthermore, the *seminar* also confirmed that JASPERS had a positive effect on improving the quality of project documentation in particular in respect to the adequate presentation of the projects in line with EU requirements. Details on these findings are presented in Appendix D on the online targeted consultation and Appendix E on the seminar.

Thus, the evidence collected from the in-depth analysis of sampled assignments, the interviews, the results of the online consultation and the seminar point to the fact that JASPERS support in the project preparation has been comprehensive, covering several aspects of project preparation, and the support has been conducive to improvements in the quality of the project documentation and compliance with EU requirements for ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects.

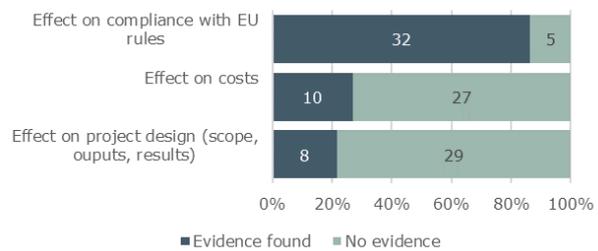
#### **Effect on quality of projects (EQ 9, EQ 5)**

The evaluation finds mixed evidence concerning the effect of JASPERS on the quality of projects. In this evaluation, 'effect on the quality of projects' is defined as changes and improvements to the project that can be attributed to JASPERS with regard to compliance with EU rules, improvements in terms of project design (scope and expected outputs and results) and in terms of improvements to project costs (cost savings) that could be observed in the assignment and project documentation and were confirmed by beneficiaries and managing authorities in interviews. To quantify the effect in terms of quality of projects, the evaluation focused on tracking improvements/changes to projects that can be attributed to the JASPERS advisory intervention. For ESIF major projects, the effect on the quality of projects could also be quantified in terms of the numbers of critical issues raised in project appraisal and the European Commission decision-making process. This has been complemented with findings from the interview with beneficiaries and managing authorities for the sample of advisory assignments and the results of the online targeted consultation.

Figure 4-8 Number of projects where evidence was found of effect of JASPERS advisory on the quality of projects (N=37\*)

<sup>72</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: Improvement in the quality of project documentation (better/more updated/complete set of data and information). A total of 210 responses, of which 37% decisive, 43% significant, 11% limited, 3% neutral, 8% no opinion.

Based on analysis of the project documentation, in 86% of the *sample of 37 advisory assignments* there was evidence to suggest that JASPERS advisory contributed to improving **compliance with EU rules**. In most cases, JASPERS improved compliance of the projects with the standards for CBA (in 24 projects). Some common issues that were addressed and remedied were: (a) that various options were discussed



Source: assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018

Note: \*5 assignments were administratively closed

in detail, but not assessed against a counterfactual scenario, (b) the identification of alternatives was not properly conducted and a decision on the option was without a robust analysis/justification, and, (c) there was a lack of strategic thinking or assessment of alternative options. Details concerning this finding are presented in the Second Interim Report (section 4.2.2.1). The perception of stakeholders in the *online targeted consultation* also confirmed this finding. Specifically, 75% of respondents to the online consultation assessed JASPERS advisory to have a decisive or significant effect in improving compliance with EU rules<sup>73</sup>.

Furthermore, the analysis of the project documentation indicates that JASPERS had an effect on project costs (understood as cost savings) in 28% of cases analysed, whereas in 72% of cases analysed no evidence of **effect on costs** was found. The findings on the effects of JASPERS in terms of cost savings are further elaborated upon in the section on efficiency (see section 4.3.3 as part of EQ 15).

When it comes to the **effect on the scope, outputs and results** of projects, the evaluation found evidence that JASPERS had an effect on the quality of projects in terms of their scope, design and results in 21% of analysed cases. The assessment relied on a systematic analysis of project documentation and application forms compared to JASPERS assignment documentation (action completion notes) to identify changes to the projects' design, their scope, output or results, which were then confirmed in interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities. While the methodology applied relied on a systematic analysis of changes in the project design recorded in the documentation which were confirmed with the beneficiaries and managing authorities, a limitation to the approach is that all analysed projects were considered to be equally susceptible to improvements in the project scope, outputs and results. A differentiation between projects that were technically and economically mature prior to the JASPERS intervention and those that were not, would have required a classification of all analysed projects according to the level of maturity and a carefully defined approach to analysing the maturity of the projects that was beyond the scope of this evaluation.

For ESIF major projects, bearing the limitation above in mind, the evaluation finds that in all 3 (19%) of the 16 assignments where JASPERS advisory was found to have a substantive effect on the scope of the projects, JASPERS intervened either at feasibility or pre-feasibility stage. In 2 of the 3 cases, the advice provided led to changes in both the scope of the projects, as well as their total investment costs and the eligible costs. The examples are presented in Table 4-7.

<sup>73</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: Improvement in the formal requirements and compliance of project documentation. A total of 210 responses, of which 30% decisive, 46% significant, 12% limited, 4% neutral, 9% no opinion.

Table 4-7 Cases of effect of JASPERS advisory on the quality of ESIF major projects

Smart development, Latvia	Water and wastewater, Croatia	Water and wastewater, Romania
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage</li> <li>Increase in the number of patients (hospital capacity)</li> <li>Revision of operational costs resulting in improved sustainability and financial impact of the project</li> <li>Revision of future plans resulting in conservative assumption and reduced risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage</li> <li>Advised on rationalising the need to replace water mains when extending the sewer system resulting in a reduction of the proposed investments</li> <li>Removal of 200 km of network extension from the scope of the project</li> <li>Cost reduction of around – EUR 6.6 m (8% of the project costs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage</li> <li>Reduction in the scope of investments in the water supply component through the exclusion of 4 agglomerations from the scope of investments</li> <li>Reduction in the scope of investments in the wastewater component through the exclusion of 2 agglomerations from the scope of investments</li> <li>Reduction in the number of new WWPPs, new sewer and new sewage network length</li> <li>Cost reduction of EUR 25 m in investment costs and 20 m in eligible costs (16%)</li> </ul>

Source: SFC2014 Application Forms and assignment documentation (e.g. action completion notes), January 2014 to December 2018

For ESIF major projects, the effect of JASPERS advisory on the quality of the project can also be observed when it comes to the number of interruptions and critical issues experienced by assisted projects. Theoretically, JASPERS-assisted projects should have few or no interruptions or critical issues as they should be addressed in the preparatory phase. In this respect, the evaluation finds mixed evidence.

The analysis of the *portfolio of assignments* confirms that JASPERS-assisted projects tend to have fewer interruptions than non-assisted projects. As presented in Table 4-8, at portfolio level major projects assisted by JASPERS advisory were interrupted 1.27 times, whereas major projects that were not assisted were interrupted 1.38 times. However, the portfolio included a large number of Polish projects that had not been assisted by JASPERS. If such projects are excluded from the calculations, then the average number of interruptions for assisted projects increases to 1.27 for assisted projects and 1.80 for non-assisted projects. Based on this, it can be concluded that JASPERS advisory does appear to have a positive effect in terms of improving the quality of ESIF major projects.

Table 4-8 Average number of interruptions for ESIF major projects assisted and non-assisted by JASPERS technical advisory

	Average number of interruptions (all projects)	Average number of interruptions (all projects, excluding Poland)
Assisted ESIF major projects	1.21 (28 projects)	1.27 (22 projects)
Not assisted ESIF major projects	1.38 (13 projects)	1.80 (5 projects)
All projects	1.27 (41 projects)	1.37 (27 projects)

Source: SFC2014, extracted in 2019

Note: The figures cover only ESIF major projects under Article 102.2 with post-submission appraisal

This finding is also supported by evidence from the country fiches in Romania, Italy and Poland<sup>74</sup> where an analysis of the number of critical issues raised in interruption letters for assisted projects was compared to non-assisted projects. The evaluation finds that JASPERS-assisted projects tend to have on average fewer (3.07) critical issues than non-assisted projects (4.25). Amongst the non-assisted projects with critical issues, more than half (9 major projects) were roads projects in Poland. If those are excluded from the analysis, the average number of critical issues for non-assisted projects increases to 6.6. This further supports the finding that JASPERS advisory has a positive effect on the quality of ESIF major projects.

In contrast to the overall numbers on critical issues and interruptions that point to a positive conclusion related to the effect of JASPERS on the quality of projects, the analysis of the sample of 16 ESIF major project advisory assignments highlighted instances where JASPERS advisory support was less effective in detecting issues with the projects, despite support being provided in the preparatory phases. An analysis of topics on which JASPERS provided advice (see Figure 4-7 above) compared to issues and observations raised in the project appraisal and EU decision-making process indicates that, despite the advice and recommendations provided by JASPERS at the preparation stage, some issues were raised as critical, non-critical or observations in the appraisal and decision-making processes. These included: option analysis (62% of major projects advised on option analysis had issues raised on this topic in the appraisal), project cost (83% of major projects advised on demand analysis had issues raised on this topic in the appraisal), risk assessment (57% of major projects advised), demand analysis (54% of major projects advised). Based on this, an initial conclusion is that JASPERS advisory only has limited effectiveness in addressing issues in specific areas. However, a more nuanced assessment is necessary as the effectiveness of JASPERS advisory in helping beneficiaries address issues with their projects also hinges on the capacity of beneficiaries to take on board recommendations received from JASPERS. This could not be verified in the context of the evaluation as process-tracing the extent to which beneficiaries followed the JASPERS's advice at the level of each topic area would be difficult, given that advice provided by JASPERS is often done in an informal manner (via calls, in meetings or emails) and is not always recorded in formal documents such as guidance notes and action completion notes (this is further elaborated in 7.2.1 on the effectiveness of management and monitoring of JASPERS services).

<sup>74</sup> The analysis was done only for Romania, Poland and Italy because the countries were included amongst the selected country cases and the other countries did not have major project applications submitted under Article 102.2 with critical issues (i.e. Slovakia, North Macedonia, Croatia).

Table 4-9 Number of projects that were advised by JASPERS advisory by area and number and percentage of projects that had issues raised at JASPERS review or EU decision (N=16\*)

Topic	Advisory (projects advised and recommendations)		JASPERS review (projects with issues)		EU decision (projects with issues)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Option analysis	13	100%	8	62%	5	38%
Demand analysis	13	100%	7	54%	2	15%
Economic analysis	9	100%	3	33%	1	11%
Financial analysis	9	100%	5	56%	3	33%
Technical description	9	100%	1	11%	1	11%
Environmental procedures	8	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Feasibility study	8	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Climate change	7	100%	2	29%	2	29%
Risk assessment	7	100%	4	57%	1	14%
Institutional capacity	7	100%	3	43%	1	14%
Project objectives	7	100%	1	14%	1	14%
Procurement and schedule	6	100%	3	50%	2	33%
Financing plan	6	100%	2	33%	0	0%
Cost	6	100%	5	83%	3	50%
State aid	5	100%	1	20%	0	0%

Source: Assignment documentation (action completion note for advisory, PSA report for review, interruption letter for EU decision) January 2014–December 2018

Note: \* 2 administratively closed

For ESIF non-major projects, amongst the sample of analysed cases (8), JASPERS recommended improvements to the quality and soundness of the technical solution and the project concept in 3 projects, which are outlined in Table 4-10. However, in only 2 of the 3 projects the advice of JASPERS materialised concretely in improvements in the project design as the third project was not approved by the managing authority (although JASPERS made recommendations on improving the quality of the project). The instances where an effect on the scope of the projects was found are presented in the table below. It is notable that for the Bulgarian assignments, advisory support was mandatory as the managing authority would not have approved the projects in the absence of a positive action completion note.

Table 4-10 Cases of effect of JASPERS advisory on the quality or scope of ESIF non-major projects

Water and wastewater, Bulgaria	Water and wastewater, Bulgaria	Water and wastewater, Slovenia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage; project was not adopted</li> <li>JASPERS recommended not to finance specific components of the projects</li> <li>The proposed changes would generate cost savings in the order of EUR 12 million (total cost of the project, of which 8.1 million of EU co-funding). JASPERS quantified at EUR 10 million the cost savings made possible in this and the next assignment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage; project was adopted.</li> <li>JASPERS highlighted that the rationale of the selected components of the project was not soundly established and proposed revisions.</li> <li>The proposed changes generated cost savings in the range of EUR 10 million (as quantified by JASPERS).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JASPERS intervened at feasibility stage; project was adopted.</li> <li>JASPERS made recommendations on the demand forecast and technical solution (including leakage analysis, leakage detection, measures for existing networks).</li> <li>JASPERS support was considered to lead to cost savings in case of non-implementation of the project amounting to EUR 30 million (of EU co-funding, on a total investment cost of EUR 41 million).</li> </ul>

Source: Assignment documentation (e.g. action completion notes), January 2014–December 2018

For CEF projects, the evaluation finds limited data pointing to an effect of JASPERS on the scope, results and outputs of such projects. Across the 10 analysed CEF assignments, the evaluation finds concrete evidence of a substantive effect of JASPERS on the design of the project in only one case. The limited effect can be explained by the fact that in 50% of the analysed CEF assignments, JASPERS intervened at the application stage, thus limiting the potential of an effect on aspects of engineering or technical design.

For IPA projects, evidence of an effect of JASPERS on the scope, results and outputs of the projects was found in one out of 5 analysed IPA assignments. The project concerned investments in energy and solid waste and the data collected pointed to the finding that the advice provided by JASPERS improved the sustainability of the technical solution and compliance with environmental rules. Amongst the sample of IPA projects analysed, only 40% (2) of those assisted by JASPERS have been successful in securing financing under IPA (both projects being in Macedonia). 60% of projects were not approved for funding, either because the beneficiary decided not to submit the application (1 project in N. Macedonia) or due to budget cuts to the IPA II Programme (2 projects in Turkey).

Interviews with beneficiaries, managing authorities and the European Commission indicate that early involvement enables JASPERS to contribute to the design of the projects and improve the envisaged results and effects of the projects. More specifically, across the 37 analysed assignments, managing authorities covering 13 assignments (out of 29 where an assessment was made) and beneficiaries covering 9 assignments (out of 16 where an assessment was made) considered JASPERS to have had an effect on the quality of the projects. In the online targeted consultation, 76% of respondents consider JASPERS to have had a decisive or significant effect on improving the quality of the project preparation, whereas 41% made the same assessment when it comes to the effect of JASPERS on cost savings<sup>75</sup>. Overall, the evidence from the

<sup>75</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects: Improved quality of project preparation (involvement in the functional and technical standards of the project). A total of 210 responses, of which 27% decisive, 44% significant, 13% limited, 5% neutral, 11% no opinion.

interviews and online targeted consultation points to a higher proportion of stakeholders considering JASPERS to have had an effect on the quality of projects and cost savings as compared to emerging evidence from the analysis of assignment documentation. However, this discrepancy can be explained by the differences in interpretation of 'effect on quality of projects' and 'cost savings' by the stakeholders as compared to the methodology applied in the current evaluation when making the assessment based on the assignment documentation.

Thus, JASPERS support is found to be comprehensive, covering various areas of project preparation. The evaluation finds that JASPERS contributed to improvements in terms of compliance with requirements (particularly CBA) in a large proportion of analysed cases (86%), which was confirmed by the stakeholders. The findings concerning the effect of JASPERS on the quality of the projects are mixed although there is circumstantial evidence from the analysis of the sample of projects and online targeted consultation to suggest that in a limited number of cases JASPERS contributed to improvements to projects in terms of their design and cost savings.

#### 4.3.2.3 Trade-off between timeline of projects and project quality

The two objectives of JASPERS (improving the quality of projects and improving the timeliness of projects) were assessed to be conflicting in the ECA report, i.e. pursuing the objective of improving project quality can induce further delays, thus prejudicing the timely submission and approval of projects and vice versa. On the one hand, JASPERS assistance can help to reach a level of good project quality and consequently a faster approval than without JASPERS. In that case, there is no trade-off. On the other hand, JASPERS assistance may request modifications to the project and extensive consultations – that may not be executed in a timely fashion – in which case quality is achieved at the expense of time. The risk of JASPERS leading to a trade-off between time and quality is highest for projects under the ESIF and IPA mandates where deadlines for submissions are more flexible than with CEF major projects.

#### **Trade-off timeliness versus quality (EQ 8)**

In operational terms, the hypothesis of 'timeliness versus quality' can be considered from two perspectives: (i) projects take less time to prepare (proportion of JASPERS intervention compared to the overall timeline of preparation of the project – i.e. from start of preparation up to submission to the European Commission) – but this is at the cost of quality (meaning a shorter duration of preparation results in poorer quality); (ii) projects take more time to prepare (duration of preparation and JASPERS intervention is longer) but the quality of the projects is high (longer duration, better quality). This hypothesis relies on the implicit assumption of a direct, high correlation between the duration of project preparation and the duration of JASPERS intervention. However, the data on the duration of JASPERS assignments has some inherent limitations as a proxy for the duration of active involvement of JASPERS in project preparation given that the duration recorded in JADE may not be proportional to the actual involvement of JASPERS in the assignment. Thus, the analysis below also applies process-tracing of the assignment context (based on the assignment fiches) to assess the extent to which a potential trade-off between 'time' and 'quality' can be explained in the context of specific projects.

Due to data availability, the hypotheses can be tested with objective data only for ESIF major projects that were submitted under Article 102.2. To test the hypotheses, proxies were used, i.e. for 'timeliness', the duration of preparation of the project (proportion of involvement of JASPERS in the project preparation from start of project preparation to submission to the European Commission) and for 'quality', the number of critical issues raised in the review phase. To expand the data, the analysis relies both on the projects that were included in the sample of 90 assignments as 'main assignments' (i.e. ESIF projects that have been assisted by Advisory and

then submitted to the European Commission under Article 102.2), as well as for projects that were included in the sample as 'linked assignments' (PSA assignments that have or have not been assisted by JASPERS). This amounts to 21 major projects. 16 of these major projects had been assisted by JASPERS advisory in the preparatory phase whereas the remaining 5 were not.

As presented in the Table 4-11, across the 16 assisted projects, the data on the proportion of JASPERS intervention relative to the timeline of project preparation, as compared to the data on number of critical issues does not show any trends. The assessment is that the quality and timeline dimensions are not directly correlated; on the one hand, there is a group of projects with longer duration of the JASPERS intervention, but some of these projects had several interruptions and critical issues. On the other hand, the sample also includes projects where JASPERS involvement was only limited or not at all, but the quality of the project was high (i.e. in terms of number of interruptions and critical issues).

More in-depth analysis and process tracing of the projects as well as interviews with stakeholders indicates that in 2 specific cases (in different countries), a trade-off between quality and time was present. In these cases, the beneficiaries decided to submit the project to the European Commission even though critical issues with the projects, identified by JASPERS, were still unaddressed. However, the trade-off here between timeline and quality was not generated by JASPERS but rather by the decision of the Member State to submit the application faster at the expense of quality. According to the interviews, this decision was driven by the need to certify expenditure. However, these examples also show that by identifying critical issues and insisting on improving the quality of the major projects, JASPERS did not compromise on quality although it was aware of the fact that the timeline would be affected.

Table 4-11 Major projects comparison: duration of project preparation, duration of JASPERS assistance and number of critical issues

Sector	MS	Advisory assistance?	Days start preparation to EC submission	Duration JASPERS advisory	Proportion of JASPERS intervention compared to project preparation duration	Number of interruptions	Number of critical issues				
							PSA report 1	Interruption letter 1	PSA report 2	Interruption letter 2	PSA report 3
ROD	HU	Yes	2,342	59	3%	1	6	11	0		
ROD	RO	Yes	5,095	287	6%	1	3	3	0		
RAM	BG	Yes	2,563	209	8%	0	0				
ROD	SK	Yes	9,112	687	8%	0	0				
ESW	PL	Yes	1,351	159	12%	1	9	4	0		
SD	FR	Yes	3,073	448	15%	1	2	3	0		
RAM	PL	Yes	1,494	379	25%	1	0	4			
ROD	HU	Yes	216	55	25%	2	3	11	1	7	
ROD	BG	Yes	6,293	1,892	30%	1	0	4			
WAW	PL	Yes	4,845	2,807	58%	0	0	1			
SD	EL	Yes	1,938	1,337	69%	2	5	6	1	5	0
SD	IT	Yes	524	443	85%	2	3	5	3	2	2
RAM	HU	Yes	1,695	1,739	103%	0	0				

Sector	MS	Advisory assistance?	Days start preparation to EC submission	Duration JASPERS advisory	Proportion of JASPERS intervention compared to project preparation duration	Number of interruptions	Number of critical issues				
							PSA report 1	Interruption letter 1	PSA report 2	Interruption letter 2	PSA report 3
RAM	PL	Yes	530	577	109%	0	0				
WAW	RO	Yes	1,251	1,858	149%	2	4	4	1	0	
RAM	PL	Yes	394	750	190%	0	0				
ROD	PL	No	5,509	NA	NA	0	0				
RAM	IT	No	9,667	NA	NA	3	7	12	3	3	2
RAM	ES	No	5,530	NA	NA	2	11	12	NA	5	3
ESW	PT	No	5,357	NA	NA	0	6	5	6		
SD	PT	No	971	NA	NA	2	5	6	0	2	

Source: Assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018

Notes: Days from start of preparation to EC submission are calculated based on SFC by taking the first date recorded in the project timetable (section H1) and the date of the first submission of the major projects to the EC.

#### 4.3.2.4 Effect on administrative capacity of beneficiaries

Although only indirectly, JASPERS advisory services to projects are found to have some effect on the capacity of beneficiaries. The effects of advisory support for specific projects on the capacity of the beneficiaries will only be observable in the long term once beneficiaries independently prepare projects without JASPERS support. The in-depth analysis of advisory assignments in the sample (37) highlighted some evidence of support that could result in improved capacity of beneficiaries in the long-term. In particular, the analysis found evidence that JASPERS helped the beneficiaries and managing authorities in the development of methodologies and tools (e.g. CBA, traffic models, guidelines for management of projects, methodologies for phasing out projects) (6 assignments) and helped support the development of projects that could be used as a model for subsequent projects (4 assignments). This was also confirmed by interviewed stakeholders who highlighted that JASPERS assistance in the preparation of specific projects is effective in ensuring the transfer of knowledge and in building the understanding and capacity of beneficiaries in the development of projects, application of methods (e.g. CBA, traffic models) and in the design of technically and financially sound projects and handling complex environmental and climate proofing considerations. Hands-on advisory support was considered by beneficiaries to be very important in improving their ability to develop investment projects and apply EU requirements and methods.

#### 4.3.3 Efficiency of technical advisory services

The analysis on the efficiency of JASPERS technical advisory support assesses the overall planning and delivery of these services and arrangements with beneficiaries (EQ 12), the planning and delivery of individual assignments, the administrative burden generated for support recipients, and whether JASPERS brought about benefits in the form of cost savings at project level (EQ 13). Findings from different evaluation activities are presented in the following<sup>76</sup> and triangulated (combining qualitative and quantitative evidence as well as different perspectives).

#### **Planning and delivery of advisory services to projects (EQ 12)**

The planning and management of JASPERS advisory services are demand driven. Once an assignment is opened, the use of resources follows the requests of beneficiaries for the entire duration of the assignment, on average multi-annual. The demand-driven nature of JASPERS planning and management of technical advisory support was already identified by the 2012 AECOM evaluation and remains unchanged since then. This use of resources by JASPERS in delivering its services is to some extent inherent to the nature of JASPERS assistance. While on the one hand it reflects a high degree of flexibility and enables a better response to the evolving needs of beneficiaries, on the other hand, and despite some improvements, it is also open to possible overuse of resources, especially for assignments of long duration and poorly specified expectations.

At *portfolio* level, JASPERS technical advisory assignment to projects had an average duration (from opening of the assignment to closure in the JADE database) of 722 days (2 years). As presented below, advisory services to ESIF major projects within the portfolio of assignments covered the highest volume of calendar days in total (139,073 days) and had, on average, the longest duration of calendar days (i.e. 809 days, 2.2 years).

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<sup>76</sup> Not all evaluation activities offer evidence on efficiency for each different service type. Desk research and the analysis of sampled assignments represent the sources offering the most insights, while the portfolio review is used mainly for the duration of assignments. Where suitable, evidence from country fiches, seminar and online targeted consultation will complement the analysis.

Table 4-12 Duration of advisory services (completed assignments) (January 2014–December 2018)

	Advisory to projects (all)	ESIF major projects	ESIF non-major projects	IPA projects	CEF projects
Average days	722	809	651	681	290
Median days	536	595	418	554	96
Maximum days	3,857	3,857	2,162	1,713	2,893
Minimum days	6	6	42	95	15
Total days	206,519	139,073	42,960	18,399	6,087
Number of projects	286	172	66	27	21 <sup>77</sup>

Source: JADE extracted 2019

While most advisory assignments provided for ESIF major projects concerned support for the preparation of mature project applications, in certain cases JASPERS assistance was provided for the phasing of projects<sup>78</sup>. Such assignments that required only phasing support were of a much shorter duration as advice was targeted at administrative issues related to the phasing. Thus, among the 25 advisory assignments with the shortest duration (i.e. below 100 days), 6 are related to phasing projects in Italy, 1 in Romania and 1 in the Czech Republic with a duration of less than 2 months. If phased projects are removed from the calculations, then the average duration of days for advisory services to ESIF major projects increases by 40 days (from 809 to 849 days).

ESIF non-major projects have a shorter average duration as compared to major projects. Technical advisory support to CEF projects had the shortest duration (on average 290 days, 9 months), which can be explained by the system of calls for proposals that imposes more discipline in terms of deadlines.

In terms of arrangements between JASPERS and Member States (see also Relevance section 4.3.1), *desk analysis* carried out for the preparation of the country fiches highlights that Country Action Plans (which cover technical advisory assignments) enable a broad medium-term planning for both the Member State and JASPERS, but they do not contain (even indicative) financial and human resource allocations or an indication of the expected working time on the assignment in terms of man-days. They also do not define the specific activities to be carried out by JASPERS under each assignment, leaving a considerable flexibility for the requests by the Member States on the agreed individual assignments. This is particularly noteworthy as the content of technical advisory support in particular can vary considerably.

### Planning and delivery of individual assignments (EQ 13)

According to the *portfolio analysis*, 15 technical advisory assignments had been open in the internal database of JASPERS for a period longer than 5 years (above 2,000 days). Most of these assignments concerned ESIF major projects (except 1 CEF project) and covered various sectors

<sup>77</sup> Over the period analysed, JASPERS provided support to 36 CEF assignments as per data contained in the CEF 1 and 2 mandate reports. However, the reports did not contain systematic information concerning the dates when the assignments were started and completed. Thus, the evidence presented here uses JADE data.

<sup>78</sup> Phased projects are those whose implementation started in the 2007–2013 period, but which could not be concluded in time and had to be split in phases, in line with the Common Provisions Regulation. In assignments dealing with phasing procedures, JASPERS supported the administrative separation in phases of the major projects in question.

and countries of activity of JASPERS. Against this background, *sampled assignments* suggest that while some assignments had a very long duration (3 sampled assignments had a duration above 2,000 days)<sup>79</sup>, the intensity of the involvement of JASPERS advisory in these assignments was not constant during the time the assignment was open. Analysis of these sampled assignments' documentation and interviews with relevant authorities revealed that JASPERS support had not been provided with the same level of intensity over the assignment's duration and there were long pauses in the level of JASPERS involvement throughout the period. This depended on the nature and scope of work, which required JASPERS input only at specific steps over a long-term activity (e.g. supporting the preparation of terms of reference for the selection of suitable consultants and, after the selection, the support in checking the quality of deliverables and compliance with the contractual specifications). In-depth analysis of *sampled assignments* shows that although ex-ante planning of resources on individual assignments was foreseen as part of the JASPERS quality processes through the preparation of project/assignment fiches, this was only done to a limited extent<sup>80</sup>.

A systematic recording of time spent per assignment by JASPERS staff was introduced only in February 2017, and it currently does not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the level of efficiency of the delivery of advisory services. Considering only sampled assignments created after February 2017 and already completed, the data from the time and labour system of JASPERS indicates that advisory services are delivered on average on 74 man-days per assignment, but this refers to only 4 assignments<sup>81</sup>. Further analysis is available in the Second Interim Report, section 4.3.2.1).

Other data on costs and resource expenditure at the level of assignments are not recorded by JASPERS.

### **Administrative burden of advisory services to projects (EQ 13)**

Systematic national level monitoring of the costs associated with JASPERS involvement in project preparation and support do not exist, as identified by the analysis of the *sampled assignments* (42) and the *country fiches* (6). Thus, data was collected primarily through interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities which suggested that the administrative burden in dealing with JASPERS is widely perceived as low and the relation with JASPERS experts is generally managed in a smooth and flexible way. Beneficiaries reported an extensive use of informal exchanges (frequent phone calls, videoconferences and email exchanges) which is considered to have allowed for an efficient use of time and financial resources (for both JASPERS and national stakeholders).

Amongst the 42 technical advisory *assignment forms* analysed, a perception of low administrative burden was reported by beneficiaries of 14 assignments and managing authorities covering 20 assignments. A perception of high administrative burden arising from JASPERS advisory involvement was reported by only one beneficiary in one assignment. For the residual assignments, beneficiaries and managing authorities did not express a judgement on the level of administrative burden. Also, amongst the *interviewed* beneficiaries and managing authorities, the

<sup>79</sup> Within the sample of selected assignments analysed, 3 assignments had a duration above 2,000 days: two (2) of these assignments related to the water and wastewater sector projects, whereas one (1) concerned roads.

<sup>80</sup> For ex-ante planning of resources JASPERS is requested to produce project fiche/assignment fiches which should provide an indication of the resources needed for the implementation of the assignment. However, in practice these fiches were only available for a minor number of assignments (10 of the 42 analysed advisory assignments) and not all contained an indication of the resources needed.

<sup>81</sup> Out of the 4 assignments, 2 are under the ESIF mandate, 1 under CEF, 1 under IPA. Consistent with data on overall duration, this limited sample indicates that ESIF assignments have the longest actual duration (147.25 and 82.75 man-days), compared to IPA (38.375) and CEF (26.125).

overall perception was that the response time for JASPERS was broadly reasonable. No significant discrepancies were found under the different mandates. Qualitatively, communication from JASPERS was largely reported as both accurate and timely. Further analysis is available in the Second Interim Report, section 4.3.2.1).

According to data collected during the interviews conducted as part of the analysis of *sampled assignments*, beneficiaries in Member States largely recognise that the time spent in the interaction with JASPERS is a 'learning by doing' investment. In any case, any other type of support (e.g. private consultants providing technical assistance) would require time and resources in addition to lengthy and burdensome tendering processes<sup>82</sup>. For this reason, the impact of devoting resources to managing the relation with JASPERS is generally deemed negligible. The avoidance of cumbersome procurement procedures to access JASPERS services, as compared to possible market alternatives, is perceived as a cost saving.

Further, both beneficiary countries and JASPERS staff recognise that Member States that have long-standing working relationships with JASPERS benefit from an increase in efficiency on the managing authority's side, because building mutual trust and understanding in professional relationships (e.g. instructing a new consultant) necessarily requires time and resources.

Based on the *country fiches* (and in line with anecdotal evidence from *sampled assignments*), Member States that host a JASPERS local office stress the importance of frequent interactions made possible by the physical presence of JASPERS staff, as face-to-face interactions are conducive to more effective exchanges.

Confirming the overall picture of an efficient delivery of JASPERS services, 78% of the respondents of the *online targeted consultation* were satisfied to a large or very large extent with JASPERS' efficiency in terms of use of time, human and financial resources<sup>83</sup>.

Ultimately, even though the assessment of the administrative burden is based on stakeholders' perceptions, all relevant sources mentioned above suggest that at the level of individual technical advisory assignments, an efficient cooperation takes place between JASPERS and the recipients of its support<sup>84</sup>. Stakeholders perceive particular efficiency gains when long-term relationships with the same experts are made possible.

### **Cost savings arising from advisory services to projects (EQ 13)**

One of the key benefits foreseen from technical advisory services to projects (particularly from support in project preparation) relates to cost reduction on project design and/or implementation as an efficiency gain. Advisory services are expected to assist beneficiaries and managing authorities in avoiding ill-designed projects with unjustified high costs.

In practice, the concept and estimation of cost savings may be controversial. For this reason, JASPERS has been working since 2017 on developing a robust methodology for the definition and quantification of cost savings in a rigorous way. The conservative approach towards the definition of cost savings currently rests on 4 conditions<sup>85</sup> and cost savings are a key performance indicator

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<sup>82</sup> Tendering processes not only represent a challenge for their duration and the burden they generate for their management, but also a further challenge in terms of preparing comprehensive and high-quality Terms of Reference, so as not to have to repeat tasks or carry out additional procurement processes later in order to close gaps not identified when drafting the tender documentation.

<sup>83</sup> 11% were satisfied only to a limited or very limited extent and 10% had no opinion or the question was not applicable.

<sup>84</sup> The 2012 AECOM evaluation also pointed to an efficient cooperation. At the time, beneficiaries of JASPERS support in fact positively assessed JASPERS' responsiveness and coordination.

<sup>85</sup> Four conditions: Only cost reductions on delivered projects with action completion note, only cost reductions confirmed by the beneficiary/Member States in feedback forms, only cost reductions plausibly explained in the value added fiche, and only cost reductions achieved and evidenced in demand analysis, option analysis,

in the JASPERS monitoring system. According to JASPERS, cost savings in 2018 amounted to EUR 318 million and assignments generating cost savings were 51%<sup>86</sup> (and the provisional rate for 2019 was indicated at 55%<sup>87</sup>). This would indicate an average cost savings per assignment<sup>88</sup> of EUR 3.7 million.

The *online targeted consultation* suggests that there is a relatively widespread perception among managing authorities and beneficiaries that JASPERS support generates cost savings. In fact, 41% of the 210 respondents identified a decisive or significant effect of JASPERS in terms of cost savings<sup>89</sup>. Further analysis is available in the Second Interim Report, section 4.3.2.1.

The *sampled assignments* offer a different perspective. Amongst the advisory assignments analysed as part of the evaluation (42 assignments, including administratively closed), almost a quarter of the sample (10 out of 42) present elements that may support the argument of cost savings being generated by JASPERS (see Table in Appendix C for details on the ten cases). Furthermore, the nature and occurrence of such achieved savings is questionable since interviewees (in the context of in-depth analysis of sampled assignments) were not aligned about the interpretation of the concept and findings of cost savings. In addition, the documents analysed and reporting such cost savings (action completion notes, value added fiches, feedback forms) were not consistent with the JASPERS' methodological standards: in all ten cases, the above-mentioned 4 conditions for identifying cost savings developed by JASPERS would not be simultaneously met. As such, it would not be possible to consider the identified changes in investment costs as cost savings generated by JASPERS advisory support at project level. In one case there is evidence that JASPERS generated cost increases, by suggesting the implementation of a project implementation unit (at a cost of EUR 10 million).

#### 4.3.4 Coherence of technical advisory services

The criterion of coherence explores the level to which JASPERS services worked together with other approaches, services and guidance at EU or national level. External coherence assesses the extent that JASPERS advisory services are coherent with EU policies and guidance (EQ 16, 18). It focuses on the EU approach and guidance on climate change, environment, and state aid. The assessment also looks at the coherence of JASPERS advisory services with other advisory services (EQ 17). Moreover, this criterion assesses the internal coherence of JASPERS services, i.e., the extent that JASPERS advisory services are coherent with JASPERS review services (for internal coherence of capacity-building and horizontal strategy support services see 5.2.4). Similarly, to the assessment of the other evaluation criteria and questions, this section presents findings based on an in-depth analysis of *sampled assignments*, stakeholder assessment (*in-depth interviews* and *online consultation*) as well as the *country fiches*.

#### External coherence of advisory services with EU policies (EQ 16) and guidance (EQ 18)

The assessment of coherence is based on the analysis of *sampled assignments*, *in-depth interviews*, and the *online targeted consultation*. At the level of sampled assignments, the alignment of advice provided by JASPERS technical advisory with the EU approach and guidance

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technical design, procurement processes (Source: JASPERS internal presentation on cost savings 'JASPERS Impact in Project Cost Reductions').

<sup>86</sup> Source: JASPERS presentation to the Steering Committee meeting, September 2019.

<sup>87</sup> No calculation of cost savings was yet available for 2019.

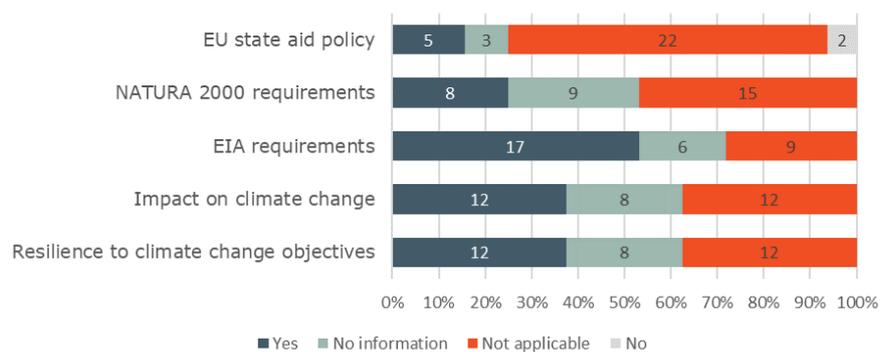
<sup>88</sup> 86 assignments, for which feedback forms were received in 2018. Source: JASPERS presentation to the Steering Committee meeting, September 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Question asked: D2. Based on your experience, what do you think was the effect of JASPERS on the following aspects? For the aspect 'cost savings for the assisted project', a total of 210 responses was collected, out of which 16% identified a decisive effect; 25% a significant effect; 19% identified a limited effect; 17% a neutral effect; 3% a negative effect; 21% had no opinion or the issue was not applicable.

towards climate change, environment, state aid and, where relevant, other aspects (such as VAT rules, CBA guidance, funding eligibility, shadow pricing, etc.) was assessed through a review of assignment documentation. In other words, the assessment looked at where JASPERS technical advisory services were inconsistent with EU requirements with regard to climate change, environment and state aid and, where relevant, EU guidance in other aspects.

When focusing on ESIF major projects, in 26 *sampled assignments* (out of 32 major project assignments), the analysis shows that JASPERS helped ensure coherence with EU objectives and guidance on climate change, environment and state aid<sup>90</sup>. In other words, the advice provided by JASPERS is assessed as coherent with the EU approach and guidance towards climate change, environment, state aid and aspects such as VAT rules, CBA guidance, funding eligibility, and shadow pricing. There were only two assignments where JASPERS advisory support was assessed as not coherent to EU guidance. Likewise, interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities covering the sample of 22 advisory assignments show that the contribution of JASPERS to ensuring coherence with EU objectives and guidance is assessed as positive. Further analysis is available in the Second Interim Report, section 4.4.1.

Figure 4-9 Areas where JASPERS contributed to coherence with the EU approach and legislation (N=37)



Source: Sampled assignment forms, 2014–2018

As illustrated above, by reviewing and providing advice, JASPERS contributed mostly to ensuring the coherence of ESIF major projects with EU environmental policy and legislation in terms of EIA requirements. Although to a smaller extent (12 assignments), based on the input from the *sampled assignments*, JASPERS also contributed to ensuring the coherence of major projects with EU climate change policy and legislation. The contribution to ensuring coherence was less evident for state aid, however, compliance with state aid rules was relevant only for a limited number of sampled assignments (7 assignments).

JASPERS technical advisory provided for an assignment under the IPA mandate (North Macedonia<sup>91</sup>) showcases how JASPERS advice is not always aligned to requirements. The action completion note reported that the feasibility study does not refer to compliance with the state aid rules. JASPERS therefore mentioned as an outstanding issue that when applying for the EU funds, the analysis of compliance with the state aid rules should be provided. This recommendation was, however, not relevant since North Macedonia is not an EU Member State and it is not required to comply with state aid rules. Thus, in this case although JASPERS was striving to ensure coherence with state aid rules, it was not fully relevant to the client as the rules are not applicable for pre-accession countries.

<sup>90</sup> For 3 assignments there is no information and another 3 assignments did not include advice related to coherence aspects.

<sup>91</sup> Advisory support provided for a waste management infrastructure project.

The close cooperation between JASPERS and the European Commission services is likely to have played a role in ensuring overall coherence of JASPERS advisory services, as it ensured transfer of knowledge and a common understanding of the application of EU requirements and policies between the two entities. For example, while providing technical advisory services to two sampled assignments JASPERS advisory engaged in a dialogue with the European Commission's services to provide clarifications on the application of state aid rules or environmental requirements.

The *online targeted consultation results* (see 8.5 Appendix D) also indicate that is coherent with EU guidance. The majority of respondents (82%) were satisfied to a very large or large extent with the coherence of JASPERS support with other EC guidance such as notes and guidelines, while 5% indicated that they were satisfied to a limited or very limited extent<sup>92</sup>.

The analysis of coherence with EU guidance was based on a systematic assessment of the level of coherence of advisory services provided for ESIF major projects with the European Commission's assessment of major projects under Article 102.2 on post-submission appraisal (PSA) of the CPR. Specifically, the coherence of advisory services with EU guidance was checked by comparing the advice provided by the JASPERS advisory function with the issues (if applicable) raised by the European Commission in the review process. This analysis indicated whether there were overlaps or duplication between JASPERS and EC guidance. The extent of coordination and complementarity between JASPERS and EC guidance was explored through qualitative data sources which included *in-depth interviews*, the *seminar* and *online targeted consultation*.

As indicated in the *portfolio analysis*, 36% of JASPERS assisted projects submitted under Article 102.2 on post-submission appraisal (PSA) were interrupted. The systematic assessment of the level of coherence of advisory services with the European Commission's assessment could be done robustly only for ESIF major projects notified under Article 102.2 on post-submission appraisal (PSA) that benefited from JASPERS technical advisory services (16 linked assignments), whereby the conclusions of the advisory support could be compared to the assessment of the European Commission in interruption letters (where applicable).

For the 11 *sampled assignments* of ESIF major projects notified under Article 102.1 on pre-submission appraisal (IQR), an assessment of coherence could not be done given that the European Commission did not prepare an official report (as is the case with PSA where an interruption letter is prepared if needed) and tacitly approved all projects without raising any issues. Similarly, for CEF and IPA projects, no documentation was available outlining the assessment made by the European Commission services to enable a thorough comparison with regard to this aspect.

For the *sampled assignment* of ESIF major projects that were notified under Article 102.2 and assisted by advisory (16 assignments), overall the conclusions of the advisory were consistent with the conclusions of the European Commission. However, some instances of differences in the conclusions of the advisory and the issues highlighted by the European Commission were found and are presented in the table below. Out of 11 projects (11 sampled assignments) that were interrupted by the European Commission, there were 7 projects (7 sampled assignments) where critical issues were highlighted in interruption letters, but not fully captured in the action completion notes drafted by JASPERS advisory (see table below). There were no projects where the opposite occurred, i.e. where JASPERS advisory raised critical issues that were later on not raised by the European Commission in the interruption letters<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> 13% did not express an opinion - not applicable

<sup>93</sup> This does not include non-critical issues raised by JASPERS advisory in the action completion notes.

Table 4-13 *Sampled assignments where differences in the assessment made by JASPERS advisory and the European Commission were found*

Projects positively assessed by advisory but interrupted by EC		Differences in assessments by JASPERS advisory and European Commission
Rail, air and maritime	1 (out of 5 assignments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While advisory (ACN) mentioned no critical issues, the interruption letter listed five issues (four of which were mentioned in the PSA report as non-critical). Issues were related to the option analysis, economic analysis, financial analysis, physical indicators to monitor progress and environmental procedures (overall poor quality of project application).</li> </ul>
Water and wastewater	1 (out of 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In one project, advisory (ACN) raised no critical issues in relation to the project. However, both the PSA and the European Commission interruption letter highlighted significant issues with the option analysis, unit costs per capita, financial analysis and risk analysis.</li> </ul>
Roads	2 (out of 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisory (ACN) raised no critical issues in relation to the project but provided recommendations to further assess the project's resilience and to carry out actions complementary to the project to stimulate more sustainable mobility. Later on, the interruption letter raised environmental requirements as a critical issue along with seven other critical issues (option analysis, demand analysis, risk assessment, climate change, etc.).</li> <li>In another project, while Advisory (ACN) claimed that the risk analysis was in line with Annex III of EU Regulation 2015/207, the first PSA highlighted that the quantitative risk analysis does not address all mandatory risks that are listed in Regulation 207/2015. The interruption letter highlighted this as an issue (missing parts in quantitative risk analysis).</li> </ul>
Energy and solid waste	1 (out of 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisory (ACN) only mentioned one critical issue with the option analysis, i.e. the missing link between demand and dimension, while the interruption letter raised an additional issue, namely the fact that the option analysis should consider additional gas volumes to be transmitted from the extended LNG terminal and the planned Baltic Pipe.</li> </ul>
Smart development	2 (out of 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While Advisory (ACN) raised three critical issues, one critical issue related to the option analysis was not captured in the ACN. Both the first PSA report and interruption letter reveal that the issue was not fully addressed prior to the first submission.</li> <li>Advisory (ACN) did not mention outstanding critical issues. In its interruption letter following the first PSA report, the Commission asked for clarifications on two of the 3 critical issues identified by JASPERS, i.e. VAT eligibility and the calculation of the residual value. In addition, the Commission raised other less significant points, in line with JASPERS' non-critical issues.</li> </ul>

Source: Assignment documentation: comparison of ACNs and interruption letters for sampled projects

The differences between the advisory assessment and the European Commission's assessment can be explained by several factors. One factor may be the timing of the advisory support compared to the EC assessment. Since advisory support takes place prior to the European Commission's assessment, there have been assignments where changes in the national or EU requirements (in the meantime) led to differences in the assessment by JASPERS advisory and

the European Commission (1 assignment). Another explanatory factor is the difference in interpretation of the rules by the European Commission as compared to JASPERS advisory (2 assignments<sup>94</sup>). Lastly, the JASPERS advisory team can assess certain issues as non-critical, while they are later raised in interruption letters by the EC (e.g. connectivity issues in transport projects). While the PSA report distinguishes between critical and non-critical issues, the issues raised in the interruption letters from the European Commission are not categorised as critical or non-critical.

### External coherence of advisory services with other services (EQ 17)

External coherence explores the coherence and complementarity of JASPERS technical advisory support with other services. A detailed overview of other services and their descriptions are presented in section 3.6. The assessment of the external coherence of JASPERS technical advisory was done by identifying cases where projects receiving JASPERS technical advisory support also benefited from other service support. The analysis focused on determining what kind of support was provided under these schemes and outlining whether there are duplications or overlaps between JASPERS and other services in the sample of assignments. Additionally, the analysis looks for any cases of inconsistency between JASPERS and other services in the sample. The findings are identified via *desk research*, the *sampled assignments* analysis and/or by stakeholder consultation (*interviews* and *seminar*).

The ECA report (2018) highlighted that most of the work of project preparation in Member States is carried out by private consultants (e.g. preparation of basic project documents such as the feasibility study or the environmental impact assessment) and given that JASPERS' role is to direct, or comment on, the production of these documents, the services are by design complementary. Given that the scope of other services and that of JASPERS differ, synergies and complementarities with other advisory services are exploited.

Amongst the 37 analysed *sampled assignments*<sup>95</sup>, 45% of projects (17 assignments) also benefited from other advisory services that were involved in the project preparation stage. The majority of these concerned ESIF major projects (7 assignments) and CEF projects (7 assignments), while the rest were related to ESIF non-major projects (1 assignments) and IPA projects (2 assignments). In terms of sectors, the rail, air and maritime sector saw the most involvement of other advisory services (7 assignments).

These other schemes involved were primarily private consultancies (12 assignments) but included other institutions such as the World Bank (3 assignments), EIB-PASSU (1 assignment) and CONNECTA (Technical Assistance to Connectivity in the Western Balkans) (1 assignment). Based on the analysed sample, the private consultancies contracted to prepare project documentation were predominantly at country level, with teams being assembled at project base. CONNECTA, on the other hand, is an EU-funded technical assistance that assists in the development and completion of the core transport and energy networks in the Western Balkans region. Its sectoral scope is therefore narrower than those of JASPERS and alternative services. More details on the differences between the mentioned schemes are presented in the table below and Second Interim Report, section 4.4.1.

The assignment level analysis indicated that JASPERS advisory services combine technical expertise with knowledge of the EU requirements and regulatory framework, which is not

<sup>94</sup> Italy and France

<sup>95</sup> Including 16 ESIF major (18 in the sample but 2 were administratively closed), 6 ESIF non-major (8 in the sample but 2 were administratively closed), 10 CEF projects (1 was administratively closed but in fact JASPERS completed the assignment), 5 IPA projects (6 in the sample but 1 was administratively closed).

delivered by other services. While private consultancies focused on the provision of assistance with project documentation preparation (such as preparing the feasibility study or CBA), the role of JASPERS advisory services was to provide guidance and advice on the prepared documentation to ensure these were in line with EU requirements. This is evidenced by the advice JASPERS provides via Guidance notes and action completion notes, where JASPERS indicates which aspects of the project and project documentation need to be amended or are missing.

Table 4-14 Support provide by JASPERS and other schemes

Schemes/support	JASPERS	Private consultancies	World Bank	EIB PASSU	CONNECTA
Project stage involvement	Concept stage and project preparation	All project stages	Implementatio n	Implementatio n	Project preparation
Activities undertaken	Strategic support and project review and recommendations	Preparation of project documentation and project review	Strategic level (prioritisation of projects)	Operational, day to day activities	Preparation of project documentation
Team	Permanent complemented with external consultants when needed	Project-based	Permanent complemented by external consultants on project basis	Project-based	Project-based
Country specific expertise	In-house local level experts	Covered by local consultants	Covered by local consultants	Covered by local consultants	In-house Western Balkan specific expertise
Fee based	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Desk research, interviews with representatives of alternative schemes

*Interviews* with beneficiaries and managing authorities covering 22 sampled assignments suggest that JASPERS advisory services are perceived as coherent with other services. According to stakeholders, the World Bank experts who assisted with the project documentation preparation process for one ESIF project (1 assignment) were not familiar with the EU requirements on CBA. Thus, the CBA documentation produced by the WB consultants was not of the required quality and did not align with the requirements of the EU. This led to a number of iterations and exchanges between JASPERS and the beneficiary to correct the CBA model and analysis.

*Interviews* with representatives of other schemes<sup>96</sup> indicate that JASPERS advisory services were complementary to the other main schemes identified in the sampled assignments. This is mainly due to the different scope of JASPERS technical advisory and those of alternative schemes. Such is the case with the World Bank, which does not offer the same type of service – it does not support preparation of infrastructural projects but rather offers financing and monitoring of implementation.

### Internal coherence of JASPERS advisory support with JASPERS review services (EQ 17)

The internal coherence of JASPERS advisory with other JASPERS services was assessed for the sampled assignments of ESIF major projects, which can undergo both advisory support as well as appraisal by the review function. Non-major projects, CEF and IPA projects do not benefit from any other JASPERS review services and are thus not included in the analysis. The analysis was complemented by findings from the *country fiches*, stakeholder *interviews* and *seminar*.

The *documentary analysis* and *interview data* collected suggest that JASPERS advisory conclusions were aligned with those of the JASPERS review services<sup>97</sup>. There were 5 cases (18%) where advice provided by JASPERS advisory and JASPERS review services was inconsistent, which is interpreted as internal incoherence. Such instances of divergence in opinions of the JASPERS advisory and review services were related to projects in almost all sectors: water and wastewater, energy and solid waste, rail air and maritime, and smart development.

Table 4-15 Number of assignments of internal coherence and incoherence on the sample of ESIF assignments of major projects (N=27)

Service/Coherence	Coherence	Incoherence	Total
PSA	12	4	16
IQR	10	1	11
Total	22	5	27

Source: Assignment forms, +year?

In two out of five cases, an issue that led to inconsistencies between JASPERS advisory and review services was diverging interpretation on VAT eligibility. In one case, the JASPERS review service raised concerns with regard to the option analysis and the eligible expenditure for co-financing, which was not accurately calculated and had not been reported by JASPERS advisory. In another case (energy and solid waste major project), the review assessment identified two critical issues related to the option analysis further to those mentioned in the action completion note by JASPERS advisory – i.e. failure to justify the technical aspect of the pipeline and no climate change adaptation, vulnerability and risk assessment.

The cases of inconsistencies between the advisory function and the JASPERS review service were confirmed by the beneficiaries and managing authorities consulted in the context of the *sampled assignments*. For 17 assignments, for which the managing authorities provided information (*interviews*) on the coherence between JASPERS advisory and review services, 16 cases of

<sup>96</sup> 7 interviews performed

<sup>97</sup> Sampled assignments of 16 major projects that were assisted by advisory and then submitted under Article 102.2 undergoing PSA as well as from the sampled assignments of 11 major projects that were notified under Article 102.1 undergoing IQR

coherence were found, with only one managing authority explicitly pointing towards a lack of coherence.

As illustrated in the Romanian *country fiche*, the dual role of JASPERS (as both reviewer and advisor) is also perceived by the beneficiaries to lead to challenges in instances where the advice coming from one JASPERS service is different than that coming from another. This can generate resistance on the side of the beneficiary towards onboarding observations coming from review (if a positive assessment of the project was provided by advisory).

While instances of lack of coherence between the advisory and review function of JASPERS may indicate some structural issues within the organisation, they are also a strong indication of the independence of the review function and that the checks and balances embedded in the appraisal procedure are functioning adequately. Nevertheless, as was pointed out during the *seminar*, while the two JASPERS functions should not dialogue with each other in principle, they should convey the same messages to national authorities and beneficiaries.

Findings from the sampled assessments of ESIF major projects, which were subject to both JASPERS advisory and review services, indicates that instances of inconsistencies or differences in assessment by the two JASPERS functions are limited but can occur. Despite these challenges and a few cases of inconsistencies, it should be noted that overall, as mentioned above, *the documentary analysis and interviews* suggest that the advisory services conclusions were generally aligned with those of the review services.

#### 4.3.5 EU added value of technical advisory services

The evaluation assesses the extent to which JASPERS technical advisory services are bringing EU added value to investment projects compared to actions taken at national, regional and international level (EQ 19) and provides insight into the consequences arising from phasing out or reducing the budget for JASPERS advisory services (EQ 20 and EQ 21). EU added value from JASPERS advisory services is assessed according to seven dimensions: a) Technical expertise; b) Methodological expertise; c) Smooth application process; d) Expertise in preparing EU projects; e) Knowledge of national context; f) experience across countries and g) Flexibility in adapting to needs. In some cases, the interviewees defined other types of added value. Also, the extent to which a similar level of support could have been provided by alternative schemes is measured by comparing to similar initiatives. Data comes primarily from interviews with stakeholders (managing authorities and beneficiaries) in connection with the sample of 90 assignments, country fiches and from the online targeted consultations and seminar.

#### **The EU added value of JASPERS advisory (EQ 19)**

The EU added value of JASPERS advisory services relates to methodological and technical expertise, knowledge and experience of EU requirements and transfer of knowledge from other Member States. Based on the analysis of the sampled assignments, beneficiaries covering 62% of the 37 ESIF major, ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA advisory assignments, indicate that JASPERS has provided added value. Furthermore, managing authorities covering 89% of the analysed advisory assignments confirmed that JASPERS technical advisory services for major projects provided added value compared to alternatives (this is further detailed in the Second Interim Report, section 4.5.1). The three main types of EU added value for JASPER advisory support are:

- 'A high level of specialised methodological and technical expertise': The analysis of the sampled assignments indicates that the technical and methodological expertise of JASPERS is assessed as valuable by beneficiaries and managing authorities in the development of mature projects and project applications. A number of interviewed

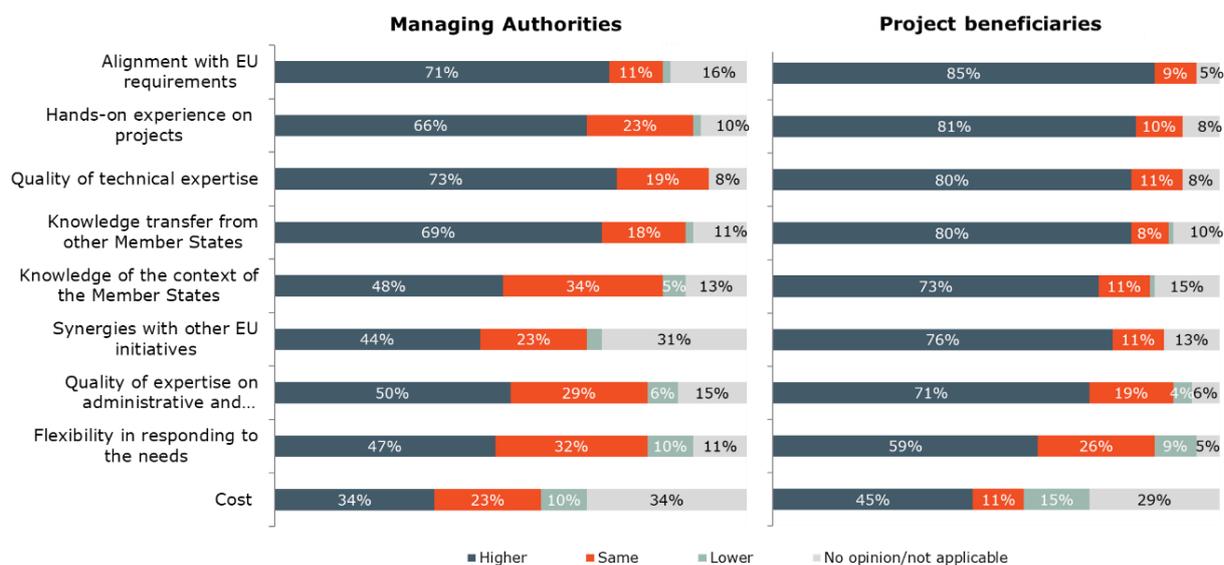
beneficiaries and managing authorities (beneficiaries covering 22 assignments, and managing authorities covering 28 assignments) mention that a similar level of expertise to that provided by JASPERS is not readily available to their knowledge through other institutions, public or private. Also, the online targeted consultation shows that the quality of JASPERS technical expertise is rated at a high value (73% of managing authorities and 80% of project beneficiaries (see Figure 4-10).

- 'Knowledge and experience of EU requirements and proximity to the EU Commission': The interviewed beneficiaries (beneficiaries covering 19 assignments) emphasise the knowledge and proximity to the EU Commission as a key added value. From the EU added value perspective, JASPERS technical advisory services ensure project compliance with EU requirements and build up capacity with beneficiaries. For example, JASPERS consults the European Commission when some issues need to be clarified (e.g. eligibility for EU financing for a typical project). JASPERS advisory also acts as an interface between the national level and the European Commission and the advisory function of JASPERS has 'easy access' to the European Commission services (e.g. DG ENV, DG COMP) for the clarification of issues related to project applications. From the perspective of both the European Commission and the national authorities, JASPERS advisory services are assessed to be credible, impartial and independent. The online targeted consultation shows that this added value is the second-highest ranked for managing authorities with 71% and has by far the top ranking in added value for beneficiaries (see Figure 4-10).
- 'Transfer of knowledge from other Member States'. The third added value is experience across countries (beneficiaries covering 10 assignments) that JASPERS advisory can provide. This type of added value derives, according to interviewed beneficiaries, from working across a number of EU countries and the ability to transfer experiences from more countries and sectors to the beneficiaries. Also, according to one beneficiary it allows for common development between the countries covered by JASPERS assistance. The online targeted consultation shows that beneficiaries (80%) in particular rated the added value of transferring knowledge from other Member States more highly. For managing authorities, 69% gave a higher rating to this added value (see Figure 4-10).

The flexibility of JASPERS in terms of service delivery is also a key feature emphasised by stakeholders who were interviewed. As mentioned under other criteria, although some ex-ante planning of resources is done by JASPERS, this is not applied in a strict manner at assignment level. JASPERS can modify its services to fit the needs of the beneficiaries accordingly, in terms of timing, quantity and expertise. The beneficiaries and managing authorities see the value in JASPERS technical advisory services' flexibility to adapt to their needs (beneficiaries covering 11 assignments and managing authorities covering 14 assignments). For example, the technical advisory can be targeted to the areas where these are most needed. Other types of added value mentioned by two beneficiaries included the impartiality, independence and credibility of JASPERS. The *online targeted consultation* shows that 59% of beneficiary respondents and 47% of the managing authority respondents agreed that one of the added values is the flexibility of JASPERS (see Figure 4-10)<sup>98</sup>. Further questions and answers related to the 'The EU added value of JASPERS services as compared to alternatives' are available in the report on the *online targeted consultation* results.

<sup>98</sup> Corresponding questions within the questionnaire: D4. For the mandates and activities you are familiar with, what do you think is the added value of JASPERS services as compared to alternatives?

Figure 4-10 Comparing the assessment of JASPERS EU added value between managing authorities and project beneficiaries



Source: Online targeted consultation 2019

Note: The total number of respondents considered is 62 for managing authorities and 96 for beneficiaries

Supporting the findings in the interviews with beneficiaries and online targeted consultations, with regard to the types of EU added value the discussions of the *seminar* with stakeholders from the Member States highlighted several positive elements of JASPERS technical advisory: strong hands-on experience, smooth cooperation, facilitation of relations between the Member State or beneficiary and the Commission, capacity-building role, independence, and focus on quality (regarded as instrumental for countering politically driven projects). Small Member States (such as Malta and Slovenia) highlighted that JASPERS has successfully bridged gaps in their administrative capacities.

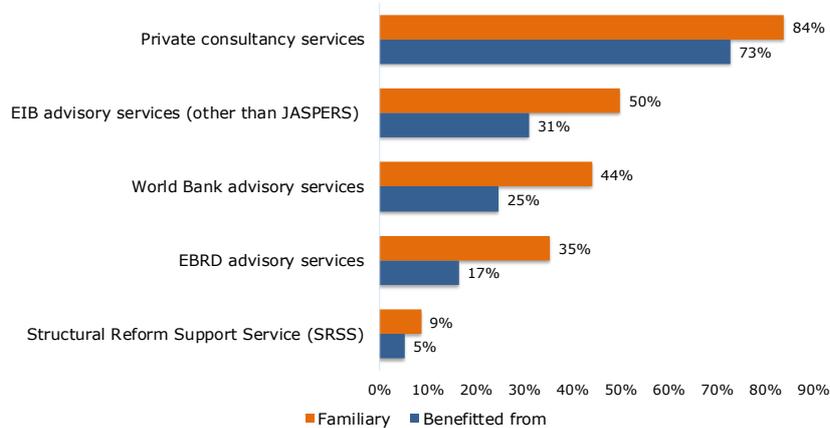
### Comparison to other schemes (EQ 19)

Compared to alternative schemes, JASPERS has a specific scope and coverage, as well as the technical and methodological expertise and geographical coverage. Several other providers of advisory services are available that could possibly substitute JASPERS technical advisory (e.g. EIB-PASSA, EIAH, NCCF, ELENA and InnovFin Advisory, private consultants). However, a desk study comparing them to JASPERS technical advisory (overview available in section 3.6 and in the Second Interim Report, section 4.5.1), shows that the scope and coverage of these services is different both in terms of the stage of the project cycle that they cover, as well as the technical and methodological expertise and geographical coverage. This comparison of alternatives, based on document review and interviews with representatives of the schemes, shows that the closest alternative to JASPERS is the European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH), which supports all project development stages and provides upstream strategy and policy advice. For IPA projects, technical assistance services are provided to beneficiary countries under the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF, joint initiative of EU and a number IFIs) and CONNECTA.

Also, in the context of the *country studies*, alternative schemes were discussed during interviews with stakeholders or groups of stakeholders (managing authorities, intermediate bodies and beneficiaries). There were large differences between the countries in terms of identifying alternative schemes, which reflect the availability of alternative schemes as well as the experiences of the beneficiaries. More experienced beneficiaries (in Italy and Poland) will be looking for specific EU- related experience (state aid, climate change) and do not regard more

general schemes as real alternatives, as these cannot provide similar technical expertise or facilitate relations with the European Commission. According to interviews with managing authorities and intermediate bodies, in some of the countries national authorities have been established to assist with preparation of EU projects, but these mostly involve assistance with document checks, and checks in relation to national legislation. In terms of ensuring compliance with EU objectives and regulations, these are not regarded as a fully-fledged alternative to JASPERS. In Slovakia, Romania and Croatia there is limited experience with alternative schemes such as EIB-PASSA. Romania has recently begun using EIB-PASSA (EIB Project Advisory Support Unit), but mainly for checking the quality of project documentation and from a technical point of view (e.g. on technical, financial or CBA expertise). In North Macedonia, an IPA country, CONNECTA is considered complementary to JASPERS. CONNECTA experts prepare and draft project documentation/studies (technical assistance), while JASPERS provides guidance and expert advice in conducting these activities.

Figure 4-11 Percentage of respondents stating familiarity with alternative advisory support schemes and having benefited from them<sup>99</sup>



Source: Online targeted consultation, 2019

Note: The total number of respondents considered is 207<sup>100</sup>

The online targeted consultation shows that respondents identify private consultancies as providing expertise, while respondents are overall less familiar (have benefited only to a low extent) from the EBRD Advisory services and the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS). Overall, most respondents indicated that the EU added value of JASPERS support is higher compared to alternative support schemes for all aspects analysed, but comparatively lower as concerns flexibility in responding to need, and aspects related to cost<sup>101</sup>.

In summary, the interviews conducted in connection with the assignment forms and country fiches, and the *online targeted consultation* all confirm that there is limited use of alternatives for EU-funded projects as these do not provide the beneficiaries (and managing authorities) with a similar level of experienced and specialised expertise (methodological and technical expertise, knowledge and experience of EU requirements and transfer of knowledge from other Member States). This is in line with the anecdotal findings of the evaluation of JASPERS in 2012 (AECOM), where added value was identified at Member State level (but not systematically). In Poland, for

<sup>99</sup> Corresponding questions within the questionnaire: D5. Please indicate your familiarity with alternative support schemes.

<sup>100</sup> Three respondents stopped completing the questionnaire at question D4.

<sup>101</sup> See OPC Report Figure 35.

example, authorities mentioned 'insight into the likely attitude and concerns of the Commission with respect to an application' as an important added value<sup>102</sup>.

### **Phasing out of JASPERS (EQ 20 and 21)**

A phasing-out or reduction of JASPERS advisory is perceived to have negative consequences. Although, as explained above, other advisory services are present on the market, their scope, geographical and sector coverage, or costs associated with their provision would not match the benefits provided by advisory services. Most of the stakeholders consulted (both beneficiaries covering 18 assignments (49%) and managing authorities covering 28 assignments (76%)) indicated that a possible discontinuation of advisory services would have negative impacts, which would extend beyond simply a lower level of accessibility to affordable advisory services. A discontinuation of advisory services is likely to have implications on the level of maturity of projects and the adequacy of design and implementation of infrastructure projects, particularly in countries with lower capacity in the preparation and implementation of infrastructure projects. This was also the case for non-major projects where managing authorities covering five assignments and beneficiaries covering three assignments foresaw issues with the quality of project documentation.

In the online targeted consultation, additional comments were also provided by survey respondents on the hypothesis of phasing out JASPERS support. More than 60% of the respondents perceived that phasing out JASPERS support would have a negative impact on a number of aspects, including the quality of projects or project documentation, the timeliness of preparation, the approval and implementation of projects, and increased administrative costs. Only a low percentage of respondents expected limited or no impact and nearly 25% of them did not provide any specific comments on the issue. In interviews with managing authorities and beneficiaries of the sampled assignments, most found it difficult to assess (beneficiaries covering 28 assignments and managing authorities covering 23 assignments). This analysis is detailed in the Second Interim Report, section 4.5.1.2.

## **4.4 Summary of the assessment of technical advisory services**

The following section presents the summary of findings concerning technical advisory services per evaluation criterion and evaluation questions. The evaluation questions are listed in section 2.1 above.

### **Relevance**

JASPERS technical advisory services are found to generally meet the needs of the beneficiaries (EQ 2). As presented in section 4.3.1, the needs assessed at the beginning of the programming period have in general materialised both in terms of priority sectors and countries requesting support. The uptake of (and demand for) advisory services for ESIF major projects is high (more than 50% of submitted projects are assisted by JASPERS). There have been fewer assignments under the IPA and CEF mandates due to funds available under these mandates, and less awareness at national level of the possibility of obtaining JASPERS support (given that these two mandates only began in 2014). For both IPA and CEF projects, the availability of technical assistance from other sources (e.g. IPF) is also likely to contribute to fewer JASPERS technical advisory assignments.

Overall, JASPERS technical advisory was relevant and mostly used to provide support with the quality of project documentation and, to a lesser extent, help improve project quality and implementation (EQ 1). One reason for this is that the project applications were often already quite mature at the stage when JASPERS intervened. The technical advisory requested was to

<sup>102</sup> JASPERS Evaluation. AECOM. 2012

support the preparation of the documentation in view of the short timeline of the calls. In other words, JASPERS was in general used to provide a 'seal of approval' and to help assess whether projects would be eligible for EU financing.

### Effectiveness

The evaluation assessed the extent to which technical advisory services contributed to the achievement of the JASPERS objectives in terms of ensuring swift preparation, approval and implementation of projects and ensuring the preparation of good quality and mature projects.

The evaluation finds mixed evidence in relation to the effect that technical advisory services have on the timeline of projects (EQ 6). For ESIF major projects, the evaluation does not point to a clear-cut finding when assessing whether the intervention of JASPERS technical advisory services has an effect on the timeline of preparation and implementation of projects. Evidence collected from the in-depth analysis of sampled assignments, interviews and targeted online consultation presents a divergent picture, with data suggesting that JASPERS can both speed up and/or delay the process of project preparation and implementation. At the same time, the evaluation finds evidence from the portfolio, online targeted consultation and interviews of a positive effect on the timeline of approval of projects. Specifically, JASPERS-assisted ESIF major projects are found to have a faster appraisal and approval timeline than non-assisted major projects (faster by 85 days for those undergoing independent quality review; by 15 days for those undergoing post-submission appraisal on average). Similarly, interruptions to ESIF major projects assisted by JASPERS are on average shorter (by 34 days) than to non-assisted projects. The evaluation interprets these findings as an indication of a positive effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline of approval of ESIF major projects. For ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects, due to limitations concerning the availability of data on timeline at portfolio level, no overall conclusion can be drawn. Circumstantial evidence from the in-depth analysis of the sample of assignments and interviews for such projects depicts a divergent picture concerning the scale and direction of the effect.

The evaluation finds evidence to indicate that the support provided by JASPERS to ESIF major projects, ESIF non-major projects, CEF projects and IPA projects was comprehensive (i.e. covered a wide set of issues and aspects related to project preparation and project documentation preparation) (EQ 7). Most often, across the 37 analysed assignments JASPERS provided concrete advice on option analysis (72% of projects), demand analysis (67% of projects), project grant application support (62% of projects), financial analysis, environmental procedures, and economic analysis (56% of projects). In such projects, JASPERS was also involved in project preparation at an early stage and was able to provide comprehensive advice on improvements to be made. However, in some of the analysed cases JASPERS advice was limited to a review of the project documentation and not the content or design of the projects. Given the high level of technical and methodological expertise of JASPERS experts, such assignments where advisory only reviews the project documentation may add less value compared to assignments where advisory support is provided in the development of the project.

The evaluation also finds evidence that JASPERS contributes to improvements in the compliance of projects with EU rules (86%), which improves the quality of the projects (EQ 9). When it comes to the effect that JASPERS has on the quality of projects in terms of their design, scope and costs, the evaluation finds mixed evidence. Circumstantial evidence is found that shows cases where JASPERS had an effect on the design, outputs and scope in a limited number of cases (21%) as well as cases where no evidence of an effect was found (89%). For ESIF major projects, the evaluation finds that at an overall level and when comparing assisted projects with non-assisted projects, JASPERS-assisted projects tend to have fewer interruptions and fewer critical issues than

non-assisted projects (EQ 5). At the same time, a closer analysis of the sample of assignments highlighted instances where issues with projects assisted by JASPERS advisory were not addressed during the preparatory phase but were raised subsequently in the appraisal and EU decision-making process. While this could be interpreted as an indication of limited effectiveness on the part of JASPERS advisory, the effectiveness of the advice provided also hinges on the extent to which beneficiaries onboard the advice. As further elaborated in section 7.2.1, the JASPERS advice and the extent to which beneficiaries onboard the advice is insufficiently recorded in written documentation to allow for a thorough check.

Finally, the evaluation assessed the extent to which a trade-off between the quality of projects and their timeliness occurs (EQ 8). The evaluation finds only circumstantial evidence where such a trade-off occurred, but the evidence points to the fact that the trade-off was generated by the decision of the Member State to submit the application faster at the expense of quality.

### Efficiency

Findings from different evaluation activities provide a consistent picture, and a triangulation of the evidence supports the conclusion that in terms of overall planning and delivery of technical advisory services to projects (EQ 12) there is room for improvements in the system put in place by JASPERS so far (not only concerning general arrangements, but also specifically for technical advisory services). The demand-driven nature of JASPERS services already highlighted by AECOM's evaluation in 2012 has not substantially changed in the 2014–2020 programming period.

The assessment of the efficiency of individual technical advisory assignments (EQ 13) is hampered by a lack of data, which to some extent reflects the nature of JASPERS assistance. JASPERS technical advisory assignment to projects had an average duration (from opening of the assignment to closure in the JADE database) of almost 2 years, with the longest assignments extending over 5 years. However, JASPERS support was not provided with the same level of intensity over the assignment's duration, and there could be long pauses in the level of JASPERS involvement throughout the period. This depended on the nature and scope of work, which required JASPERS input only at specific stages in a long-term activity. The overall planning and management mechanisms that JASPERS has in place with regard to financial resources, human resources and time resources of advisory assignment is not based on systematic ex-ante planning, monitoring and ex-post assessment of resource expenditure (man-days and actual costs) and a clear link between resources deployed and outputs or deliverables produced. Deliverables, outputs and level of expertise required are defined during the implementation of the assignment in agreement with the beneficiaries and in the spirit of the technical assistance partnership, leaving a considerable flexibility for requests by the Member States on the agreed individual assignments.

Interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities suggested that the administrative burden in dealing with JASPERS is widely perceived as low and the relation with JASPERS experts is generally managed in a smooth and flexible way, especially thanks to the use of informal exchanges (frequent phone calls, videoconferences and email exchanges). Beneficiaries in Member States largely recognise that the time spent in interaction with JASPERS is a 'learning by doing' investment.

A triangulation of data from different sources suggests that while there is a general feeling among stakeholders that JASPERS frequently generates cost savings at project level, and this is also reported in the feedback forms collected by JASPERS and used in their KPI system, the materialisation of this effect is not supported by solid evidence. When individual assignments are analysed in depth and the sources and nature of cost savings are scrutinised, there is limited

evidence about the generation of savings at project level. This is probably due to the fact that the complexity of the concept of cost savings, combined with an ever-evolving methodology for their identification, leads to varying interpretations of savings in the documentation and among stakeholders. Stakeholders may be led to identify a cost-saving effect generated by JASPERS because of the support provided to Member States without fees. The avoidance of cumbersome procurement procedures to access JASPERS services, as compared to possible market alternatives, is rightly perceived as a cost saving.

### **Coherence**

The advice provided by JASPERS technical advisory is generally aligned with the EU approach to the application of requirements and legislation (EQ 16 and EQ 18), other services (EQ 17) and internally. However, differences in views between technical advisory and the issues highlighted by the European Commission were found. Furthermore, JASPERS technical advisory and review services are found to be internally coherent, although some cases of inconsistencies or differences in conclusions from advisory and review were found. No duplication or overlaps were found between JASPERS advisory support and other advisory support services in the projects covered by the sampled assignments. Internal coherence between JASPERS services was generally identified, however the dual role of JASPERS (as both reviewer and advisor) is also perceived by the beneficiaries to lead to challenges in cases where the advice coming from one JASPERS function is different to that coming from another.

### **EU added value**

The technical advisory support provided to ESIF major projects, non-major projects, CEF and IPA provided by JASPERS is perceived by stakeholders as bringing important added value. This added value includes the methodological, technical and experience across countries, the flexibility of the services and transfer of knowledge and skills through the hands-on provision of JASPERS technical advice (EQ 19). Although other advisory and technical assistance schemes may provide similar services, their scope and type (both thematic, sectoral and geographical) and level of EU expertise and knowledge is different to that of JASPERS. These other schemes that provide services similar to JASPERS (EIB-PASSA, EIAH) are found to complement (provide service at different stages) rather than overlap with JASPERS services. Alternative schemes that can provide similar, but not identical services, are used in some Member States (EQ 20). Phasing out JASPERS technical advisory could be perceived as a risk to the quality of projects and managing authorities. However, beneficiaries are unsure whether they would actually pay for JASPERS advisory assistance (EQ 21).

## 5 CAPACITY BUILDING AND HORIZONTAL/STRATEGY SUPPORT

This chapter presents the results of the evaluation of JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services in the current programming period. The chapter outlines the processes and portfolio of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support assignments (section 5.1), the findings by evaluation criteria (section 5.2), and a summary of the assessment (section 5.3). Data gaps and limitations in the findings are presented in chapter 2.3.

### 5.1 *Processes and portfolio of horizontal and strategy support and capacity-building services*

This section gives a brief overview of the processes and portfolio of assignments for both capacity-building services and horizontal and strategy support services.

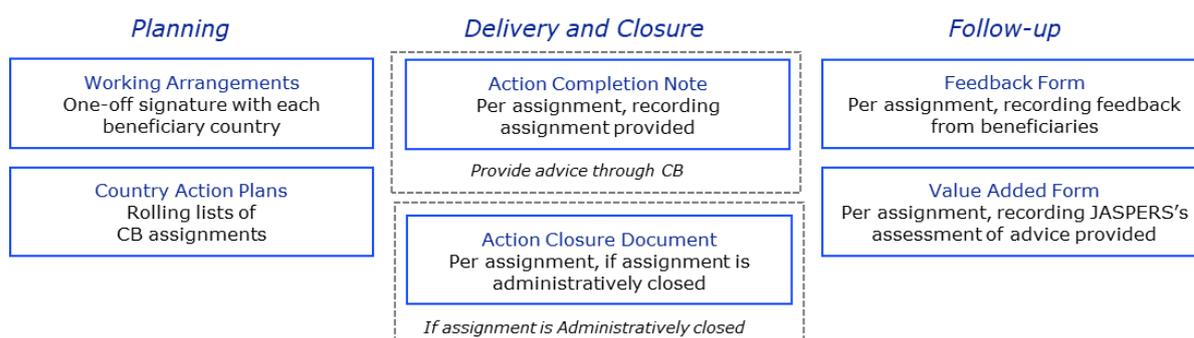
#### 5.1.1 *Processes and portfolio of JASPERS capacity building*

The key objective of **capacity building** (as indicated in the JASPERS intervention logic presented in section 3.4 of this report) is to enhance the skills and knowledge in national administrations and project promoters/beneficiaries via targeted training. The capacity-building services do not target individual projects, but rather seek to raise the capacity of the national administrations to prepare good quality investment projects. Capacity-building services may include training, workshops, seminars, on-line fora, train the trainer sessions as well as other networking and knowledge-sharing activities such as the dissemination of guides and studies. Capacity-building services can be provided to beneficiaries covering all three mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA), target participants from one country (country-specific capacity building) or cover multiple countries (multi-country). Multi-country assignments are developed in cooperation and coordination with the European Commission services. Similarly, the topics discussed during such sessions can be specific to a sector or area relevant for the preparation of projects (e.g. state aid, environmental issues) or combine topics cutting across several sectors (multi-sector assignments).

The delivery of capacity-building activities is done by JASPERS, particularly through the Network and Competence Centre (NCC) which coordinates the activities. Furthermore, the Networking Platform (as part of the NCC) also maintains the dedicated online website used to disseminate knowledge and information, JASPERS Knowledge and Learning Centre<sup>103</sup>. The needs for capacity building activities are identified by the Network and Competence Centre via several channels, namely: as a direct request from the countries or as a result of other advisory support where issues are identified in terms of gaps in the administrative capacity of beneficiaries. These are then formalised as an assignment in the Country Action Plans. An overview of the processes related to capacity building services are presented below. The planning processes for capacity building services are similar to those for technical advisory support.

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.jaspersnetwork.org/display/HOME/Homepage>

Figure 5-1 Key processes related to capacity-building services



Source: JASPERS Quality Manual, v1.4

In the period January 2014–December 2018, an analysis of the JASPERS portfolio shows that in terms of volume, capacity-building services constitute 5% of the portfolio of assignments (see Appendix B on portfolio analysis, section B.3.3 for details). As shown in the table below, in the current programming period, capacity-building services were only delivered under the ESIF and IPA mandates, and by far the largest share falls under the ESIF mandate i.e. 48 out of 52 (92%) assignments. Under the IPA mandate only 4 capacity-building assignments were delivered in the analysed period.

Table 5-1 Capacity building assignments (N=52, **completed and ongoing**, January 2014 – December 2018)

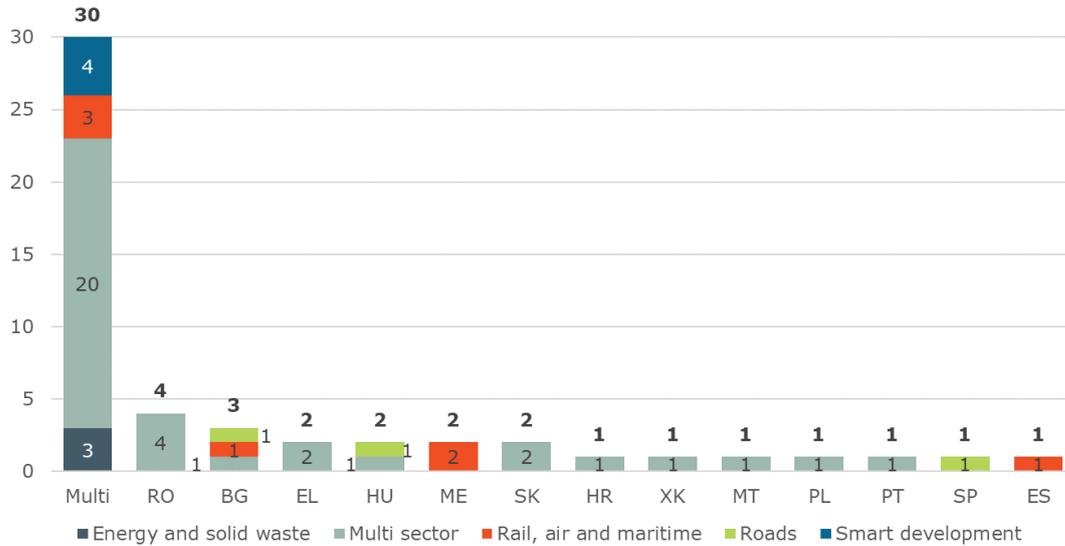
	ESIF assignments		IPA assignments		Total (*)	
	#	% total ESIF	#	% total IPA	#	% of total
Multi-sector	34	71%	1	25%	35	67%
Rail, air and maritime	5	10%	2	50%	7	13%
Smart development	4	8%	0	0%	4	8%
Energy and solid waste	3	6%	0	0%	3	6%
Roads	2	4%	1	25%	3	6%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>92.3%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: JADE extracted 2019 (\*) % calculated based on the total amount of horizontal and strategy support assignments

As presented in the figure below, multi-country and in-country capacity-building assignments were almost evenly split in the analysed period, i.e. 30 multi-country assignments and 22 in-country assignments<sup>104</sup>. Most countries benefited from 1-2 such assignments in the analysed period. Romania and Bulgaria were the only countries with more than 2 assignments.

<sup>104</sup> It should be noted that the data received from JADE also included 5 capacity-building assignments whose completion date as per JADE was 2013. Given that these did not fall in the cut-off date for this evaluation, they were excluded from the portfolio analysis.

Figure 5-2 Distribution of capacity building assignments by sector and country (N=52, **completed and ongoing**, January 2014–December 2018)



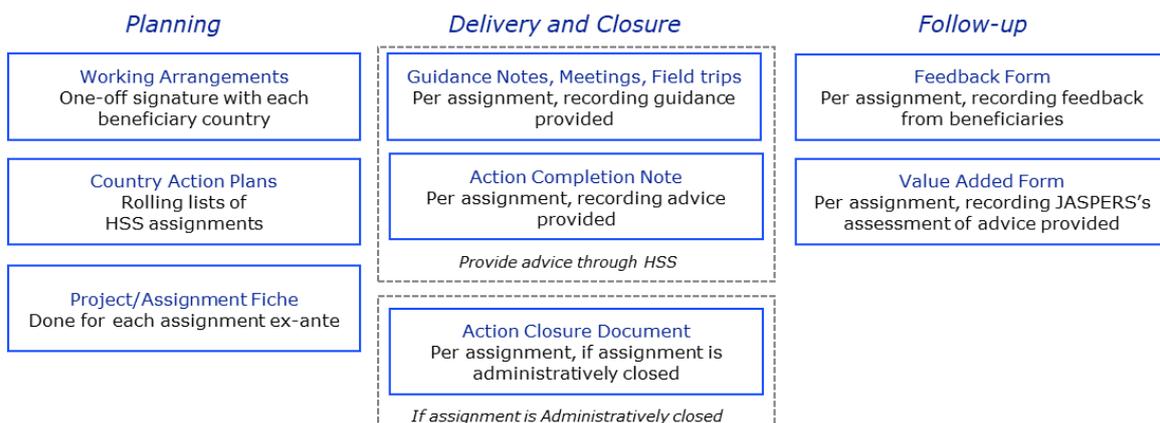
Source: JADE extracted 2019

Note: The data received from JADE also included 5 capacity-building assignments whose completion date as per JADE was 2013. Given that these did not fall in the cut-off date for this evaluation, they were excluded from the portfolio analysis.

### 5.1.2 Processes and portfolio of JASPERS horizontal and strategy support

The overall objective of **horizontal and strategy support services** (as indicated in the JASPERS intervention logic presented in section 3.4 of this report) is to strengthen the capacity of national authorities to plan and select mature projects for investments. The support by JASPERS is provided upstream in the preparation of national strategies and master plans. Such assignments are not project-specific, but often sector-specific or focusing on a specific horizontal need and may concern, for example, supporting counterparts in developing specific strategies, such as national transport strategies, waste management plans and integrated urban development strategies. JASPERS’ horizontal and strategic support may also cover assistance in the development of operational programmes, drawing up guidelines for the development of investment projects, preparation of project pipelines and development of models (e.g. transport models) and planning tools. The processes related to horizontal and strategy support services are similar to those for technical advisory services. The processes are presented in the figure below.

Figure 5-3 Key processes related to horizontal and strategic advisory support



Source: authors, based on JASPERS Quality Manual, v1.4

In the period January 2014–December 2018, horizontal and strategic support services were performed by JASPERS under all three mandates (ESIF, CEF and IPA). An analysis of the JASPERS portfolio shows that approximately 17% of JASPERS assignments were horizontal and strategic support assignments (see Appendix B on portfolio analysis, section B.3.3 for details). As shown in Table 5-2, most of the assignments relate to the ESIF mandate (90%), and 9% to the IPA mandate, and only 1% to the CEF. Almost 50% of the assignments in the portfolio are concentrated in the water and wastewater sector (20%) and rail, air and maritime (28%).

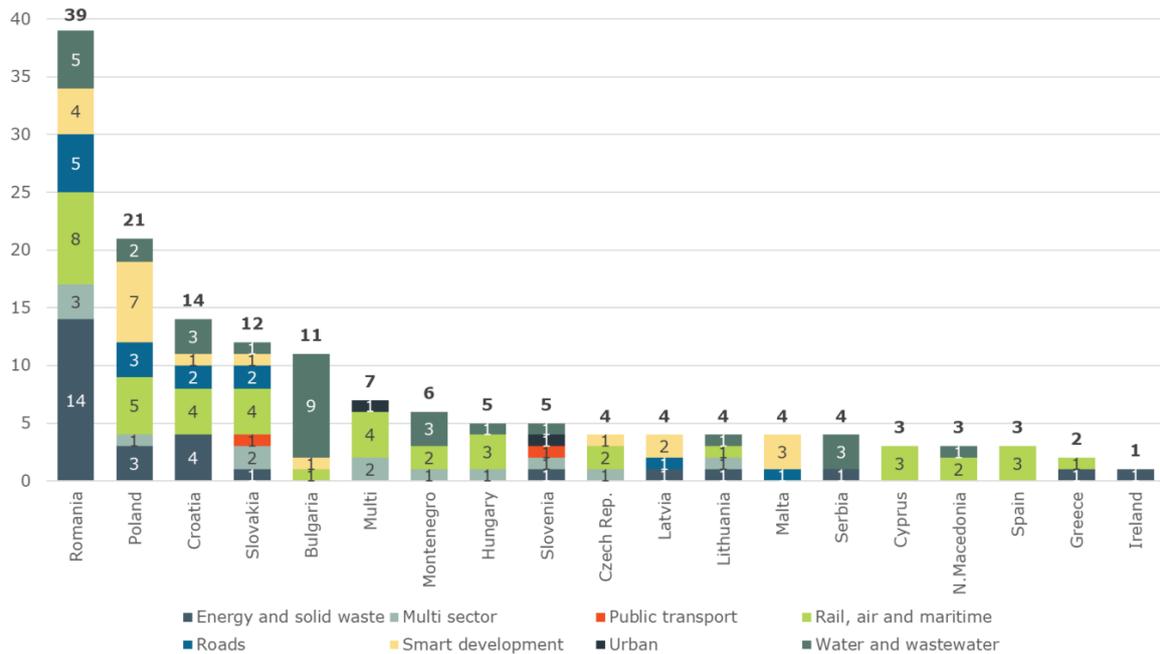
Table 5-2 *Distribution of horizontal and strategy support assignments by sectors and mandates (N=152, **completed and ongoing**, January 2014–December 2018)*

	ESIF		CEF		IPA		Total (*)	
	#	% ESIF	#	% CEF	#	% IPA	#	%
Energy and solid waste	27	20%	-	-	1	8%	28	18%
Multi-sector	12	9%	-	-	1	8%	13	9%
Public transport	2	1%	-	-	-	-	2	1%
Rail, air and maritime	37	27%	2	100%	4	31%	43	28%
Roads	14	10%	-	-	-	-	14	9%
Smart development	20	15%	-	-	-	-	20	13%
Urban	2	1%	-	-	-	-	2	1%
Water and wastewater	23	17%	-	-	7	54%	30	20%
Total (*)	137	90%	2	1%	13	9%	152	100%

Source: JADE extracted 2019 (\*) % calculated based on the total amount of horizontal and strategy support assignments

The services are performed based on requests by countries. JASPERS' horizontal and strategy support was mostly requested and implemented in Romania, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria as shown in the figure below. Almost two thirds (64%) of the horizontal and strategy support assignments were delivered to five countries. This group includes large ESIF beneficiaries together with the newest EU Member States.

Figure 5-4 Distribution of horizontal and strategy support assignments by sector and country (N=152, completed and ongoing, January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JADE extracted 2019

## 5.2 Assessment of the evaluation criteria

In this section JASPERS’ capacity building service and horizontal and strategic support service are assessed according to the five evaluation criteria. Each criterion is introduced with an explanation of the criterion in relation to the two services.

### 5.2.1 Relevance of capacity building and horizontal and strategic support

In relation to capacity building and horizontal and strategic support, the assessment of relevance focuses on assessing the extent to which JASPERS is responding to Member States’ needs for capacity building and strategic support (EQ 2). Thus, the assessment looks at whether the needs for JASPERS service, assessed/identified either by JASPERS or by Member States, mirrors the actual delivered services.

#### Relevance of capacity building services (EQ 2)

The desk research shows that the needs assessment conducted by JASPERS in 2013 in preparation for the current programming period identified a number of needs for capacity building in Member States and IPA countries who received assistance (it is noted that no assessments were conducted with regard to EU Member States that did not receive JASPERS support in the 2007–2013 period). Table 5-3 shows that in most sectors, the needs for capacity building were low or medium across ten countries. A few high-need sectors were identified: roads and water and wastewater (for Bulgaria and Romania). In the remaining sectors, low or no needs were identified for most countries.

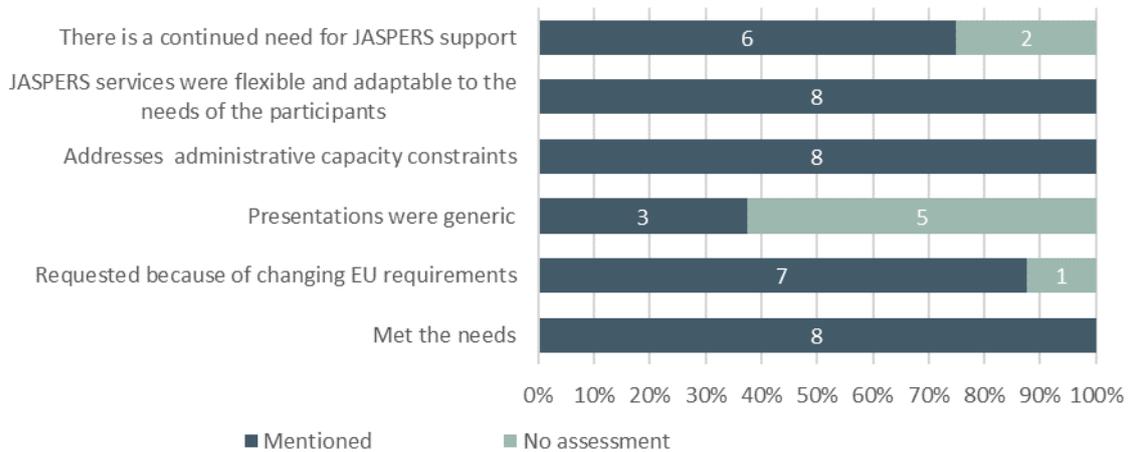
Table 5-3 Mapping of needs for support in capacity building/horizontal and strategic support and identified for the programming period 2014–2020 by Member States, JASPERS and the European Commission

	BG	CY	CZ	EE	HU	LT	LV	MT	PL	RO	SK	SI
Roads	H/M	L/-	M/H	-/L	M/H	-/M	-/M	L/M	L/H	H/L	L/M	-
Public transport	M/H	-/L	L/H	-/L	L/M	-/M	-/M	M/M	L/H	M/H	M/M	L/-
Water and wastewater	H/L	-/M	L/M	-/L	-/L	L/M	-/L	L/M	L/H	M/M	L/M	L/M
Flood risk, climate change	M/L	-/M	L/M	-/L	-/M	L/L	L/M	L/M	M/H	M/M	L/M	L/M
Solid waste	M/M	-/L	-/L	-	-/L	-	-	-/L	M/M	M/M	-	-
Energy	M/M	-/L	-/M	-/L	-/L	-/L	-/L	-/L	-/L	M/M	-/L	-
Knowledge economy	M/H	-/L	-	-/L	L/L	-/M	-/L	-	L/M	M/H	L/M	-/L

Legend: High need - **H** Moderate need - **M** Low need - **L**  
 Source: Adapted based on JASPERS Needs Assessment (2011)

For capacity building, it is difficult to establish a clear link between needs and the actual services delivered because: (1) capacity-building services are primarily multi-country and multi-sectoral; and (2) they often focus on cross-sectoral themes. The sectoral needs are therefore addressed through assignments across sectoral capacity-building and training programmes rather than as specific sectoral assignments. Table 5-1 shows that 67% of the assignments are multi-sectoral and thus not linked to a sector. The largest single sector capacity-building services are delivered in the rail, air and maritime sector (13%), which does not feature amongst the listed sectors in the JASPERS needs assessment.

The *assignment documentation* indicates (for all eight sampled assignments) that JASPERS capacity-building was relevant in meeting the needs of the requesting authorities. More specifically, the assignment documentation (in all cases) refers to the need to address administrative capacity constraints in specific areas (e.g. environment, state aid, climate, SUMP, etc.) of the authorities requesting it. In all assignments, an analysis of the assignment documentation (feedback forms and value-added fiches, in particular) implies that the services were flexible and adaptable to the needs of the beneficiaries of capacity-building services. In one of the state aid seminars organised in Romania and Croatia, the feedback from seven participants (out of a total of 41 who responded) called for the use of more case studies when asked about suggested formats for future activities. The review of assignment documentation for subsequent workshops shows that JASPERS acknowledged this issue and addressed it in ensuing training workshops. Further analysis is available in the Second Interim Report, section 4.1.4.

Figure 5-5 Relevance of JASPERS capacity building as mentioned by assignment documentation (N=8<sup>105</sup>)

Source: Assignment documentation (value added fiches, action completion notes, feedback forms), January 2014–December 2018

The *interviews* with beneficiaries interviewed for the sampled assignments largely confirmed that JASPERS capacity building services were relevant to their needs. While only five out of eight beneficiaries (covering five assignments) signalled that the support met their needs, there is no indication to the contrary for the remaining three. In one case (feedback documentation for 1 assignment) participants in capacity building seminars noted that the presentations were too generic, with limited information on specific assignments. According to participants in the *seminar*, train the trainer courses are relevant to the need for achieving knowledge transfer amongst authorities and boosting experts' motivation. Furthermore, seminar participants suggested that JASPERS could be more proactive and should organise conferences where stakeholders share their experience of both good and bad practices, along with problems and challenges from different projects and countries. A finding from the *seminar* is that capacity building activities more geared towards non-major projects are needed for Member States with a limited number of ESIF major projects.

Overall, information from the *assignments* and perceptions of national authorities shared during the *interviews*, *online targeted consultation* (in particular, capacity to review project applications and CBA and to prepare projects)<sup>106</sup>, and the *seminar* point to the need for a constant monitoring and strengthening of administrative capacity. Nevertheless, the *country fiches* (covering 6 countries) show that perceptions and the uptake of JASPERS capacity building services are quite different across different countries, depending on the general capacity of national authorities to successfully prepare and implement projects. Two countries (Italy and North Macedonia) did not benefit from JASPERS capacity building assignments. Poland, Croatia, Slovakia had a lower number of such assignments. The Romanian country fiche offers a somewhat different example. JASPERS has assisted the Romanian national authorities through the delivery of four capacity-

<sup>105</sup> Out of the total of 11 capacity building assignments sampled for this evaluation, four were grouped under one assignment covering multiple countries. Therefore, the assessment here is based on the remaining eight assignments.

<sup>106</sup> The need to develop capacity to review project applications and CBA and to prepare projects was identified as very relevant or relevant by the majority of respondents to the questionnaire: 75% and 73% respectively (Question asked: C2. Which of the following needs that may be addressed by JASPERS support are relevant in your specific case? A total of 210 responses). The majority of stakeholders also views JASPERS as relevant (to a very large or to a large extent) to addressing these needs: 67% and 69% respectively (Question asked: D1. Based on your experience, to what extent do you think that JASPERS was able to respond to the following needs? A total of 210 responses).

building assignments in the current programming period. In two out of three countries with lower uptake (namely Poland and Slovakia) stakeholders reported that JASPERS technical advisory also provided hands-on capacity building to the staff involved in working on specific projects. At the same time, it is worth noting that Poland is the country with the highest incidence of multi-country capacity building activities.

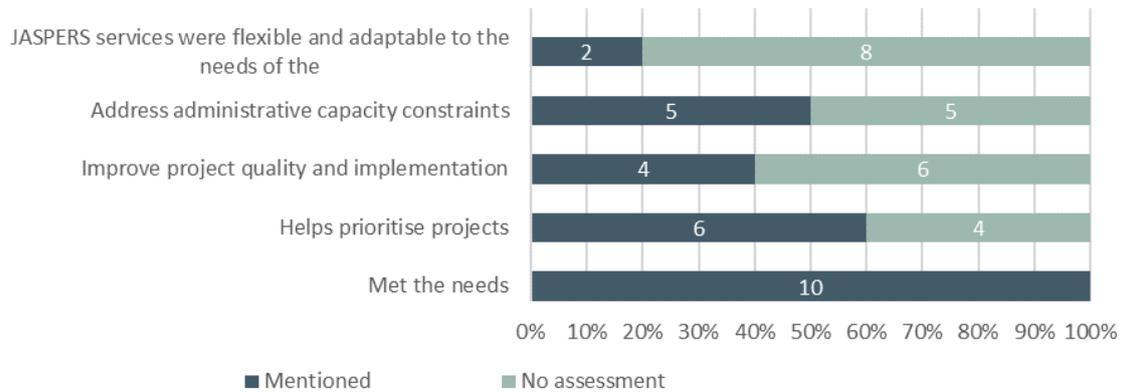
### **Relevance of horizontal and strategy support (EQ 2)**

The relevance of horizontal and strategy support looks at the needs specified at the outset of the programming period, and the services actually delivered. It also considers the reasons for requesting the JASPERS support.

A comparison between the JASPERS needs assessment and the actual delivered service in horizontal and strategy support is more straightforward than in capacity building, as most assignments are single-sector. An analysis of the portfolio shows that the largest sector (across countries) for horizontal and strategy support is rail, air and maritime. This sector is not specified as an individual sector in the JASPERS needs assessment (covered by public transport) from 2013. The JASPERS needs assessment (Table 5-3) shows high and medium needs in roads and public transport, and for the remaining sectors it shows medium to low or no needs. The water and wastewater sector was identified as a high-need sector for Bulgaria, and in this sector, JASPERS delivered 9 assignments. JASPERS delivered 14 assignments in Romania in the energy and waste sector which was assessed as a sector with medium need. Overall, the needs assessment pointed to higher needs for horizontal and strategy support than that indicated for capacity building activities (see previous section).

The *assignment documentation* (feedback forms and value added fiches) suggests (for all ten assignments) that the horizontal and strategy support services were relevant for the national authorities requesting them. JASPERS mainly supported beneficiaries in the prioritisation of projects (6 assignments), addressing administrative constraints (5 assignments) and project quality (4 assignments). Those areas can be linked to the needs identified in the JASPERS post-2013 needs assessment: (1) support for the preparation of integrated national or regional strategies; and (2) support for the identification, prioritisation, and definition of projects (see Table 5-3).

Figure 5-6 Relevance of JASPERS horizontal and strategy support as mentioned in assignment documentation (N=10<sup>107</sup>)



Source: Assignment documentation (feedback forms and value added fiches), January 2014–December 2018

The managing authorities/beneficiaries *interviewed* were generally satisfied with the relevance of horizontal and strategy support received, with 9 out of 10 explicitly indicating that it met their needs. Based on the evidence from the *country fiches*, 4 out of the 6 (Romania, Croatia, Poland and Slovakia) countries used horizontal and strategy support assignments in line with the level of need indicated in the JASPERS needs assessment, with North Macedonia also benefiting from three assignments. Only Italy did not request any horizontal and strategy support. Respondents to the *online targeted consultations* shared that developing strategies in line with EU objectives is a need that they experience (67% assess this need as very relevant or relevant)<sup>108</sup> and that JASPERS support is relevant in addressing this need (62% view JASPERS horizontal and strategy support as relevant to a very large extent or to a large extent)<sup>109</sup>. Experiences shared by the attendees of the *seminar* referred especially to the support provided with meeting ex-ante conditionalities and to the preparation of traffic models or sustainable urban mobility plans (representing tasks that were performed for the first time in the Member States and that, due to their strategic nature, are not expected to be performed on a frequent basis).

Both the documentary evidence and stakeholder assessments corroborate the need for thorough planning. The documentation for six assignments and interviews for five has mentioned that the reason for requesting JASPERS horizontal and strategy support relates to help with prioritising projects. However, The Croatian State Audit Office (2017) found that horizontal activities have suffered from lack of proper planning and prioritisation of projects<sup>110</sup>. Improved planning and targeting of horizontal and strategy support assignments may be required, as indicated by the high proportion of administratively closed horizontal and strategy support assignments (19%) (see Table 3-1). Similarly, the stakeholders interviewed for the Slovakia country study reported that the political cycles and pressure for a timely approval of the strategy documents may limit the time available for the development of a robust strategy.

<sup>107</sup> Out of the 14 horizontal and strategy support horizontal and strategy support assignments sampled for this evaluation, four were either administratively closed or the activities foreseen under it were incorporated into another assignment. Therefore, no information is available on these four assignments, and the analysis is based on information from the remaining ten.

<sup>108</sup> The remaining respondents were as follows: 11% assessed this need as not very relevant, 7% assessed it as not relevant, and 14% had no opinion, or the question was not applicable to them.

<sup>109</sup> The remaining respondents were as follows: 9% claimed JASPERS horizontal and strategy support was relevant to a limited extent, 6% assessed it as relevant to a very limited extent, and another 23% had no opinion, or the question was not applicable to them.

<sup>110</sup> State Audit Office (SAO) (2017), *Izveštje o obavljenoj reviziji učinkovitosti provedbe operativnog programa konkurentnost i kohezija 2014–2020*, Republic of Croatia - State Audit Office, Zagreb

### 5.2.2 *Effectiveness of capacity building and horizontal and strategic support*

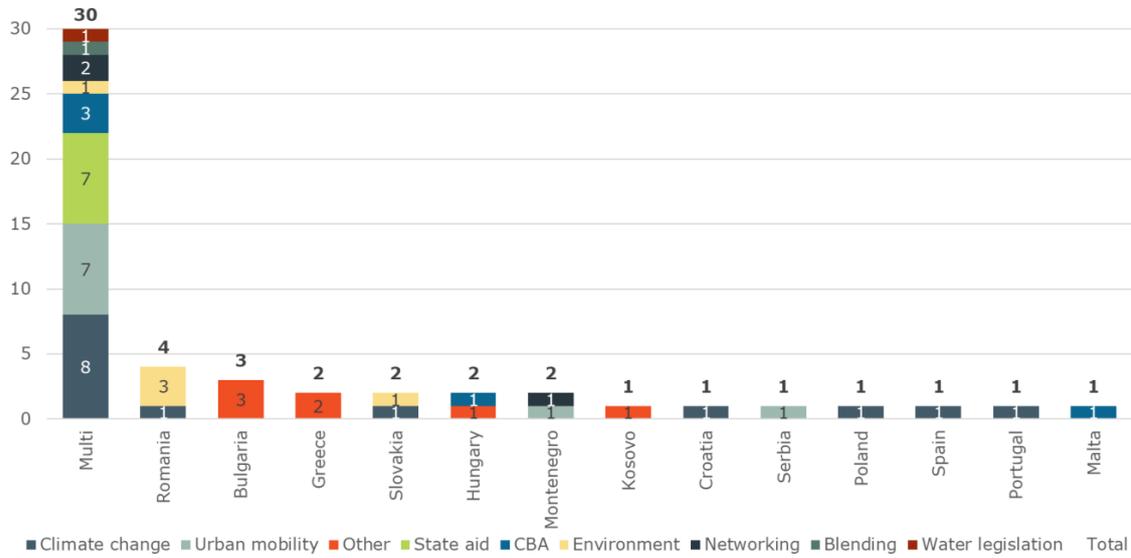
The effectiveness of the capacity building services has been assessed in relation to the extent to which the assignments have reached their overall objectives of strengthening the administrative capacity of beneficiaries (EQ 11). Capacity building assignments have the overall objective of supporting Member States in increasing their administrative and technical capacities in relation to project preparation cycle and compliance with EU requirements and established good practices. In this context the term 'administrative capacity' is used to refer to knowledge of project planning and application processes, including methodological approaches to be applied when developing project applications. The effectiveness of horizontal and strategy support has been assessed in relation to the extent to which the services have reached their overall objective of setting policy objectives and strategic frameworks in beneficiary countries (EQ 10). In this context, the term 'setting policy objectives and strategic frameworks' was understood to refer to the ability of JASPERS to enable the development of relevant strategic frameworks that facilitate the planning and preparation of infrastructure projects.

However, as elaborated under the methodology chapter (see chapter 2), this evaluation takes place mid-way through the programming period and many assignments are still ongoing or have been recently completed. Specifically, at the end of 2018, 41% of capacity building assignments and 41% of horizontal and strategy support were still ongoing. Effects arising from the implementation of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support assignments are likely to be more visible effects in the longer term, but such effects are less likely to be observable in the short-term. Thus, the findings presented in the following sections focus more on the outputs and results arising from capacity building and horizontal and strategy support activities, and, where possible, present findings on the overall effects and impacts of such activities.

#### **Effectiveness of capacity building (EQ 11)**

Capacity building activities covered a wide variety of topics and themes. Overall, the data indicates that the capacity-building activities have been effective (at the level of outputs and results). Given that this is a mid-term evaluation, the observed effects and impacts from the capacity-building activities completed at this stage are likely to materialise in a longer-term perspective and are, therefore, more difficult to observe in the context of the current evaluation. At the level of outputs and results, the data indicates that, compared to the previous programming period, the level of activity of JASPERS in terms of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support has increased. The previous evaluation of JASPERS found that JASPERS had provided a total of 87 such assignments (covering both capacity building and horizontal support). In the current programming period, JASPERS delivered 52 capacity building assignments and (as further elaborated below) 152 horizontal and strategy support assignments. In terms of capacity building, JASPERS provided training, seminars, workshops and guidance documents in a variety of areas but most often on topics related to climate change (17% of ongoing and completed assignments), environmental aspects (14%), CBA (8%) and state aid (8%), as presented in the figure below. Most of the assignments covered multiple countries (57%) whereas in-country capacity building activities accounted for 42% of completed and ongoing assignments in the current programming period.

Figure 5-7 Number of capacity building assignments per country and theme (N=52, **completed and ongoing**, January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JADE extracted 2019 data for sectors, authors coded the information for themes based on the titles of the assignments.

Note: The data received from JADE also included 5 capacity building assignments whose completion date as per JADE was 2013. Given that these did not fall in the cut-off date for this evaluation, they were excluded from the portfolio analysis.

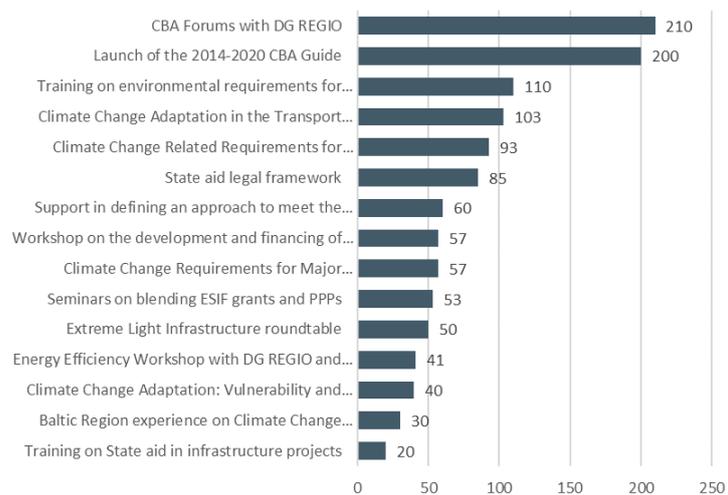
Multi-country capacity building assignments are found to be effective in ensuring a high outreach across countries and in covering topics of high relevance for the Member States. Topics of training such as CBA, environmental legislation and climate change were attended by a large number of participants ranging between 20 to 200.

Furthermore, data on the geographical coverage of participants in multi-country capacity building activities indicates different levels of engagement across countries.

As shown in Table 5-4 below,

across 8 capacity building assignments with a multi-country coverage, it is notable that very 'active' (i.e. with a high number of participants) countries included Romania, Poland, Hungary and Croatia in particular when it comes to the topics of climate change and environmental aspects. The table below is also indicative that multi-country capacity-building assignments tend to have a high outreach both in terms of number of participants and geographical coverage.

Figure 5-8 Number of participants per multi-country capacity building assignment (N=15, January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JASPERS data

Table 5-4 Geographical coverage of participants for selected multi-country capacity-building events (N=8)

Theme of the workshop	No participants	BE	BG	CZ	DK	EE	ES	FR	GR	HR	HU	IT	LT	LV	MT	ND	RO	PL	PT	SK	SL	SE
State aid	85	3%	2%	5%			7%	2%	11%	7%	4%		3%				17%	10%	2%	3%	2%	
Climate change	30				3%	3%							3%	13%				40%				3%
Climate change	93		4%	8%			3%		3%	18%	4%		2%				11%	18%		2%	8%	
Climate change	40	2%	16%	11%						14%	11%			2%			9%	11%		14%	2%	
Environmental legislation	110	8%		15%			3%		17%	22%	29%	5%	13%		13%	3%	44%	30%	5%	12%	26%	
Blending ESIF	53	4%	2%	2%			2%			2%		6%	9%	2%	2%		13%	6%		6%	4%	
Climate change	57			14%					18%	11%	4%		2%	4%	9%		5%	23%		5%	7%	
Climate change	103			5%		2%	11%	1%	2%	5%	19%	1%	7%	6%	5%		22%	40%	6%	11%	19%	

Source: JASPERS. Data was provided on the geographical coverage for 8 capacity-building assignments.

In-country capacity building activities were developed across several countries with higher concentrations of such activities in Romania and Bulgaria. At the opposite end, countries as Slovakia, Poland, Croatia had only limited level of capacity-building activity despite a persistent need for administrative capacity in the countries.

Based on evidence collected in the context of the 4 *country fiches* where capacity building assignments had been delivered (Croatia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, N. Macedonia), the higher uptake of capacity-building services in Romania as compared to the other countries can be explained in particular by the strategic approach to the development of capacity-building services, whereby JASPERS and relevant authorities in Romania developed a strategy and a training action plan for the delivery of JASPERS services (see box below). Specifically, the approach to the development of capacity building activities has been focused on supporting the country in the achievement of ex-ante conditionalities related to environmental legislation.

Text box 5-1 Example of strategic approach to planning capacity building activities from Romania

#### Capacity building on environmental topics (4 assignments), Romania

The Ministry of European Funds and the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania requested support from JASPERS in fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities included in Annex XI of Regulation EU 1303/2013 related to the criterion on arrangements for training and dissemination of information for staff involved in the implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which was not fulfilled. JASPERS together with the national authorities developed a training strategy<sup>111</sup> and a national action plan for training on EIA/SEA<sup>112</sup> for environmental competent authorities from Romania for the period 2014–2020. Based on this, JASPERS developed 4 training assignments. In one assignment, JASPERS adopted a 'train-the-trainer' approach whereby it provided training to approximately 20 persons (first round session) and 10-12 persons (second round session). The nucleus of trained trainers then provided 15 additional trainings to approximately 400 people from regional and local environmental authorities. The assessment by the national authorities was that the activities of JASPERS in Romania had a strong impact, both in terms of ensuring the achievement of the ex-ante conditionalities related to environmental requirements (which were fulfilled in October 2019) as well as in building the administrative capacity of national authorities in applying the legal provisions of the EIA/SEA.

Source: Country Fiche for Romania based on interviews with JASPERS NCC, Ministry of European Funds, Ministry Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania

While the capacity building activities in Romania have been effective in achieving their intended objective of ensuring that the country complies with the ex-ante conditionalities, the national level capacity building activities had a narrower focus and did not target aspects beyond environmental

<sup>111</sup> JASPERS (2013), Training Strategy on EIA/SEA for the environmental competent authorities from Romania 2014-2020.

<sup>112</sup> JASPERS (2013), National Action Plan for training on EIA/SEA 2014-2020.

legislation. Nevertheless, as presented in Table 5-4, Romanian project promoters and relevant authorities had high involvement in multi-country capacity building assignments covering topics beyond environmental issues, including state aid and climate change aspects.

The analysed *sample of 8<sup>113</sup> capacity-building assignments* suggests JASPERS' support was effective in ensuring a wide outreach to targeted participants, coverage of pertinent themes and in terms of development and dissemination of tools and methods that can be used by relevant authorities in project preparation. Furthermore, the 8 analysed capacity-building assignments have resulted in the organisation of 18 workshops and training events reaching out to over 700 participants and covering aspects related to Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), state aid, environmental and climate change legislation. *Interviews* with national authorities covering 2 sampled assignments, (which may seem small at face value but was still representative<sup>114</sup>) highlighted how the information disseminated in the analysed assignments also raised awareness amongst participants of topics related to project preparation. However, the level of participation and engagement across the different analysed assignments varied. As presented in the Table 5-5 below, multi-country training addressed to a wider audience has been successful in terms of ensuring a wider outreach. Being addressed to a narrower audience, national-level training has only managed to engage targeted participants with some exceptions (e.g. cumulative impacts training in Romania). The comparatively high level of participation in the Romanian assignments can be attributed to a historical relation between JASPERS and the Ministry of Environment in delivering such assignments.

Table 5-5 Number of workshops/training sessions organised and number of participants (N=8)

Theme	Country	Participants from	Number of workshops	Number of participants	Year
SUMP training	Multi	SI, BG, PL, LT, CY, LV, EE, EL, ES	9	300	2016-2017
Cumulative impacts training (environment)	Romania	RO	2	94	2015
State aid legal framework workshop	Multi	BE, BG, CZ, FR, EL, LV, LT, PL, SK, SI, ES, TR	1	85	2014
State aid in RDI	Multi	RO, HR	2	74	2016
Energy efficiency workshop	Multi	BG, HR, CZ, EL, MT, LV, LT, PL, PT, SK, SI, ES, UK	1	62	2014
Climate change adaptation training (VRA)	Multi	BE, BG, HR, CZ, EL, HU, LV, PL, SK, SI	1	40	2016
Climate change training	Croatia	HR	1	31	2016
Project cycle management workshop	Montenegro	MN	1	20	2014

Source: Action completion notes, January 2014–December 2018

<sup>113</sup> The sample included 11 capacity-building assignments, but 3 assignments were administratively closed, and no support was provided by JASPERS.

<sup>114</sup> However, one of the national authorities (Romania) covered in fact 3 additional similar capacity-building assignments (further to the one in the sample for which the interview was conducted) and brought that track-record knowledge to the interview. Thus, its answer has more weight as it covers 7% of the portfolio of capacity building assignments. Furthermore, the national authority was a very active participant in multi-country capacity building assignments. Similarly, another of the authorities interviewed (Croatia) was representing a country that was highly active in multi-country assignments (see Table 5-4 above).

The 8 capacity-building assignments that were analysed also had an important contribution to make in terms of dissemination of knowledge about tools and guidelines for project development. According to interviews with one national authority (covering 7% of the capacity-building assignments in the portfolio), the material was also used by stakeholders to train their peers in national administrations. For the sample, of 8 capacity-building assignments analysed, tools and guidelines disseminated by JASPERS or developed after the delivery of the training (to reinforce the dissemination of knowledge) in the analysed capacity-building assignments included: a template for an 'Anytown' Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, which could be used for the development of SUMP (disseminated during the SUMP training); the guidance notes on basics of Climate Change Adaptation Vulnerability and Risk Assessment<sup>115</sup> (developed after the delivery of multi-country training on VRA, 2017); and the toolkit for EIA and SEA general ex-ante conditionalities (developed prior to the delivery of the training and used during the trainings, 2013). The toolkits, guidelines and guidance were made available via the JASPERS Networking Platform website to a wider audience, reaching beyond the seminar participants.

An assessment of the extent to which capacity building activities resulted in transfer of knowledge and effectively built the capacity of beneficiaries would need to rely on a robust analysis of the before/after capacity of beneficiaries on the specific topics. However, such an assessment was done by JASPERS in only one case (project cycle workshop) out of the 8 analysed assignments. The pre- and post-training results in the case of the project cycle workshop indicates that the transfer of knowledge was substantive, i.e. overall an average increase in the correct answers to the post-training test as compared to the pre-training test was from 31% to 73%. In the absence of similar pre- and post-training assessments, the assessment of the extent to which transfer of knowledge has taken place can be done based on the participants' assessments. Evidence from the feedback forms and feedback reports for the 8 assignments indicates that overall the participants in the capacity-building activities were satisfied with the content and delivery of the training and they perceived the activities to have reached their objective of building capacity. Detailed findings in this respect are presented in the Second Interim Report (see section 4.2.2.4 and Appendix A.3.6).

*Interviews with national authorities* for 3 of the sampled capacity-building assignments<sup>116</sup> (of the 8 completed assignments analysed) assessed that the assignments had a positive effect in terms of transfer of knowledge to participants on specialised topics and in terms of building the capacity of participants to assess aspects related to state aid and environmental legislation in project preparation. Amongst factors enabling the effectiveness of the capacity-building activities, interviewees highlighted the timing of the training activities, the tailored and targeted content, the flexibility and continued support of JASPERS, and the methods utilised. Furthermore, interviewees conveyed that learning by doing as part of technical advisory assignments is equally important to capacity-building activities. The interviewees also highlighted a continued need for support given the continuous developments in relation to the legislative requirements.

Similar to the interviews conducted for the sampled assignments, when it comes to the effectiveness of JASPERS in terms of building administrative capacity, the *online consultation*

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<sup>115</sup><http://www.jaspersnetwork.org/plugins/servlet/documentRepository/downloadDocument?documentId=381>

<sup>116</sup> However, one of the national authorities (Romania) covered in fact 4 capacity-building assignments (further to the one in the sample for which the interview was conducted) and brought that track-record knowledge to the interview. Thus, its answer has more weight as it covers 7% of the portfolio of capacity-building assignments. Furthermore, the national authority was a very active participant in multi-country capacity-building assignments. Similarly, another of the authorities interviewed (Croatia) was representing a country that was highly active in multi-country assignments (see Table 5-4 above).

findings show that 53% of respondents assessed JASPERS support to have a decisive or significant effect on building administrative capacity, whereas 16% considered JASPERS had a limited or negative effect<sup>117</sup>. Although the online questionnaire did not include open-ended questions to support the ratings, an explanation for the assessments expressing limited or negative effects was raised during the seminar. The participants during the *seminar* expressed a general satisfaction with JASPERS capacity building activities and presented positive examples of increased maturity in national capacity building systems as a result of support from JASPERS. However, participants also drew attention to the need for more tailoring of capacity building activities for non-major projects. Such concerns were raised by smaller countries that benefit to a lesser extent from capacity building via technical advisory support due to the reduced number of major projects in such countries.

In conclusion, although it is too early for overall effects and impacts arising from capacity-building activities to materialise, given that 45% of the assignments in the analysed portfolio are still ongoing at the stage of this evaluation, there is data from the analysis of in-depth assignments, country fiches and the interviews with national authorities to suggest that capacity building activities provided by JASPERS have an effect on supporting the development of administrative capacity in the beneficiary countries. Additionally, the perception of slightly more than half (57%) of stakeholders consulted is that JASPERS had a decisive or significant effect on supporting administrative capacity building. Indications for improvements in terms of the effectiveness of capacity-building activities were found in relation to further tailoring of such activities to smaller countries with a high proportion of non-major projects.

### **Effectiveness of horizontal and strategy support (EQ 10)**

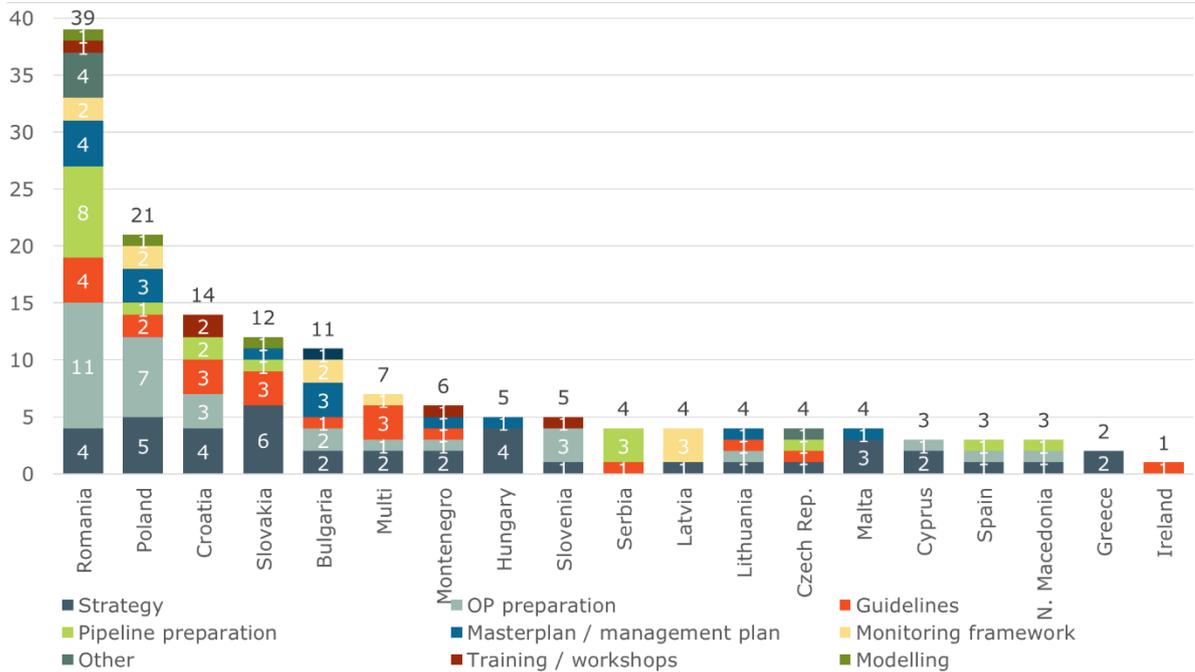
The evaluation assessed the extent to which JASPERS horizontal and strategy support activities influenced setting strategic policy objectives in beneficiary countries (EQ 10). The evaluation finds that horizontal and strategic support have contributed to the development of strategies and frameworks, but the wider effects (i.e. whether the strategies led to improved project development) have been difficult to ascertain at this stage given that such effects are likely to materialise in the longer term. Furthermore, as of end of 2018, 41% of horizontal and strategy support in the portfolio of all assignments were still ongoing.

Horizontal and strategic support cover a very wide range of themes and topics and are not linked to specific projects. Often support was delivered to a sector in order to prepare a strategy or a plan, thus the effect of JASPERS should be sought in terms of the impact that the support has on the development of investment projects, for example, which will only take place after the assignment has closed. An analysis of the portfolio of horizontal and strategic support assignments (see figure below) shows that 84% focus on five topics: development of strategies, preparation of operational programmes, development of guidelines, and preparation of pipeline and master plans. 50% of the assignments in the portfolio are concentrated in the water and wastewater and rail, air and maritime sectors. This correlates with the fact that these two sectors consist of many similar investment projects, which benefit from the planning and prioritisation process conducted through an overall strategy and/or master plan.

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<sup>117</sup> Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: increased administrative capacity of national/regional authorities. A total of 210 responses out of which 18% decisive, 35% significant, 16% limited, 10% neutral, 20% no opinion.

Figure 5-9 Number of horizontal and strategy support assignments per thematic issue and country (N=152, completed and ongoing, January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JADE extracted 2019 data for sectors, authors coded the information for themes based on the titles of the assignments

The 12 completed *horizontal and strategy support assignments* that were analysed concerned various themes ranging from master plan and management plan preparation (3 assignments in Malta, Poland, Bulgaria), strategy preparation (3 assignments in Malta, Romania, Croatia), monitoring frameworks and guidelines (3 assignments in Latvia, Romania and one multi-country), pipeline preparation (2 assignment in Romania and Serbia) and workshops (1 assignment). The administratively closed assignments covered pipeline preparation (1 assignment in Montenegro) and assistance to the authorities in the road sector (1 assignment in Slovakia). The sample also included 2 administratively closed assignments. One assignment in Slovakia had been closed as the authorities decided to integrate the support into a wider assignment related to the development of a transport master plan which was also assisted by JASPERS. The second assignment in Montenegro was closed due to lack of follow-up from the national authorities.

As part of the analysed sample, in-depth analysis of assignment documentation (action completion notes, value-added fiches, feedback reports) combined with additional desk research (i.e. assessing whether the strategies or plans were implemented and achieved their objectives) and interviews with national authorities were used to assess whether the assignments achieved their objectives.

In 83% of the 6 analysed assignments that concerned the development of master plans, evidence from assignment documentation and interviews indicated the assignments had achieved their objectives. For all 6 assignments, the initial objective was to support authorities in the development of master plans and strategies. Evidence elicited through assignment documentation and desk research suggests JASPERS support had a positive effect on the development of the strategies in 5 of the 6 assignments. Furthermore, in 3 cases, the adoption of the master plans and strategies was also conducive to enabling the national authorities to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities (in Malta, Poland, Croatia), which was an objective of the assignments. Finally, in one case, the information from the assignment forms suggests that although JASPERS set out to support the beneficiary in the development of a national strategy, the end support of JASPERS

eventually only focused on the review of the tender specifications for the national strategy. While JASPERS did make an important contribution to the development of the tender specifications for the strategy, due to delays in contracting the consultants for the development of the strategy, JASPERS did not have the opportunity to assist in reviewing the quality of the end strategy. Thus, in this case, it was assessed that JASPERS did not fully fulfil its initially intended objective.

The support provided for the development of the master plans and strategies also resulted in development of administrative capacity of some beneficiaries. Evidence obtained through assignment documentation for assignments in both Malta and Croatia indicates that the support provided by JASPERS led to improved capacity of the beneficiaries to operate the national transport models.

Table 5-6 *Results and outputs of assignments concerning master plans, management plans and strategy development compared to initial objectives*

Assignment and its objectives	Results/outputs	Assessment by evaluator*
<b>Master Plan, Malta, ROD</b> Support in the development of a Transport Master Plan Enable the achievements of ex-ante conditionalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport Master Plan approved and implemented (Dec. 2016)</li> <li>• Ex-ante conditionalities achieved (Jan. 2017)</li> <li>• Improved capacity (beneficiaries can operate transport model)</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Master Plan, Bulgaria, WAW</b> Support in the development of Water and Wastewater Master Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Water and Wastewater Master Plans approved and implemented</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Master Plan, Poland, ESW</b> Support in the development of a Waste Master Plan Enable the achievements of ex-ante conditionalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master Plan developed and approved and implemented</li> <li>• Ex-ante conditionalities fulfilled</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Strategy preparation, Romania, ROD</b> Support in the development of an ITS Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TOR for the strategy developed (but limited effect on the overall strategy)</li> </ul>	Partly achieved objectives
<b>Strategy preparation, Malta, SD</b> Support in the development of an ITS Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITS strategy approved and implemented</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Strategy preparation, Croatia, ROD</b> Develop a national strategy Enable the achievements of ex-ante conditionalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Transport Strategy approved and implemented (2014)</li> <li>• Projects in OP screened in line with national objectives</li> <li>• Improved capacity (beneficiaries can operate transport model)</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives

Source: (\*) Assessment by evaluator based on in-depth analysis of assignment documentation (action completion notes, value added fiches, feedback reports) January 2014–December 2018, interviews with national authorities, questionnaires from JASPERS, additional desk research (e.g. analysing the content of the final master plans and comparing it with versions received from JASPERS through which advice was provided to authorities).

In the other 6 assignments analysed, JASPERS was set to achieve various types of objectives ranging from support upstream in the development of eligibility and selection criteria for project selection and guidance for project preparation (in particular on CBA) (e.g. in Serbia, Latvia) to

support in the development of monitoring frameworks (e.g. Romania). Information elicited through project documentation indicates that in 83% of these assignments, JASPERS had achieved the initially intended objectives.

Table 5-7 Results and outputs of assignments concerning pipeline preparation, monitoring frameworks and guidance compared to initial objectives

Assignment objective	Results / outputs	Assessment by evaluator*
<b>Pipeline preparation, Serbia, ESW</b> Review of the terms of reference for the national programme on energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved quality of the ToR for the national programme on energy efficiency in building</li> <li>Review of ToR for the national programme on energy efficiency in building</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Pipeline preparation/strategy development, Romania, ESW</b> Support in developing a strategy/methodology for the selection of smart grid investments, including formal eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methodology for selecting smart grid investments</li> <li>Development of administrative capacity of beneficiaries via dissemination events</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Monitoring framework, Romania, SD</b> Develop monitoring framework for RDI investments Ensure compliance with ex-ante conditionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methodology for monitoring and evaluation of RDI investments</li> <li>Ex-ante conditionality fulfilled</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Guidance, Latvia, SD</b> Support in developing guidance application of CBA in RDI projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop to provide guidance on the application of eligibility criteria</li> <li>RDI projects developed in line with guidance</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Guidance, MULTI, RAM</b> Guidance on appraisal of projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guidance developed</li> <li>Project prepared in line with the guidance</li> </ul>	Fully achieved objectives
<b>Workshop, Macedonia, MULTI</b> Deliver a workshop on CBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop delivered but the development of administrative capacity has been limited</li> </ul>	Partly achieved objectives**

Source: (\*) Assessment by evaluator based on in-depth analysis of assignment documentation (action completion notes, value added fiches, feedback reports) January 2014–December 2018, interviews with national authorities, questionnaires from JASPERS, additional desk research (e.g. analysing the content of the final master plans and comparing it with versions received from JASPERS through which advice was provided to authorities. (\*\*) Mixed evidence was obtained from the assignment documentation (as explained above) and interviews with beneficiaries.

*Interviews* with national authorities and beneficiaries covering the 12 selected assignments further substantiate the finding that JASPERS was effective in supporting the development of strategies and frameworks and in setting policy objectives at national level. On the other hand, less than half of respondents to the *online targeted consultation* (40%) considered JASPERS to have had a decisive or significant effect on improving the development of sector strategies or

faster development of sector strategies<sup>118</sup>. The discrepancy between the overall positive finding emerging from interviews and the mixed picture from the online consultation can be explained by the fact that a large proportion of respondents to the online consultation made no assessment. If such respondents are excluded from the analysis, the proportion of respondents to the online consultation that considered JASPERS to have had a positive effect on improving the sector strategies and faster development of strategies increases to 56%. The *seminar* further supports the positive findings related to horizontal and strategy support services as participants highlighted in particular the positive effect of such services in helping countries meet ex-ante conditionalities.

In conclusion, as mentioned above, wider effects arising from the horizontal and strategy support services are likely to materialise in the longer term. However, the in-depth analysis of assignments, interviews with relevant authorities and the online consultation activities provide an indication that horizontal and strategy support assignments are achieving their initially intended objective of supporting beneficiaries to develop strategic frameworks. Thus, such assignments are contributing to the development of strategic objectives.

### 5.2.3 Efficiency of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support

The analysis on the efficiency of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support assesses the planning and delivery of these services (EQ 12) and the generated administrative burden (EQ 13). The analysis relies on different sources and, despite the lack of data on the costs per individual assignment, provides insights into the overall efficiency of these services.

For capacity building, the assessment of planning and delivery relies on the duration of the different types of capacity building services, on the characteristics of sampled assignments and on evidence collected during the seminar. The assessment of the generated administrative burden is based on the perception of the recipients of JASPERS capacity building interviewed for the in-depth analysis of sampled assignments.

For horizontal and strategy support, the analysis addresses the difficulty inherent in ensuring efficient planning and delivery in light of this service type's features (combining information on the duration of assignments, findings from sampled assignments and interviews with support recipients). The assessment of the generated administrative burden is based on the perception of the support recipients.

#### **Efficiency of planning and delivery of capacity building (EQ 12)**

According to the project *portfolio* review, the overall duration of capacity building assignments was on average 512 days, but there is a considerable variation in duration across the different themes, reflecting the diversified nature of capacity building activities. Capacity building in state aid has the lowest average days per assignment whereas networking and environment have a more than double duration. No evidence is available on the working time in terms of man-days spent by JASPERS: although a tracking system of man-days has been in place since February 2017, data provided by JASPERS on the sampled assignments did not include any capacity building and horizontal support assignments.

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<sup>118</sup> Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: improved development of sector strategy/planning. A total of 210 responses, of which 12% decisive, 28% significant, 17% limited, 15% neutral, 28% no opinion.

Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: faster development of sector strategy/planning. A total of 210 responses, of which 12% decisive, 28% significant, 17% limited, 15% neutral, 28% no opinion.

Table 5-8 Days of JASPERS involvement in capacity-building services (completed assignments by theme), January 2014–December 2018<sup>119</sup>

	CBA	Climate change	Environment	Networking	State aid	Urban mobility
Average days	578	521	724	1,033	278	427
Median days	578	526	820	1,033	371	404
Maximum days	772	850	990	1,696	393	717
Minimum days	383	231	267	369	113	133
Total days	1,155	4,688	2,897	2,065	1,391	2,564
Number of projects	2	9	4	2	5	6

Source: JADE data for sectors, authors coded the information for themes based on the titles of the assignments covering January 2014–December 2018, extracted in 2019.

Considering only the 11 *sampled assignments* of capacity building confirms a high variation in duration (from a minimum of 113 days and a maximum of 846), reflecting the diversified nature of capacity building activities. Out of 11 assignments, 3 were administratively closed. The in-depth assessment was performed on the remaining 8. For 4 of these assignments there is evidence of the number of JASPERS experts involved, ranging between 2 and 11. The highest number of experts involved (11) refers to a multi-country assignment. Further, external consultants contributed to the delivery of the service in only in 1 out of 8 cases. In this case, the consultants were responsible for designing and delivering the training (in the field of sustainable urban mobility planning). These tasks were awarded to the chosen consultancy through a procurement procedure managed by the EIB, which ensured the selection of a highly specialised company, with clearly defined tasks to deliver on and an economically advantageous tender. Although no counterfactual scenario is available, this approach appears to have been managed efficiently.

During the *seminar*, anecdotal evidence of capacity building assignments leading to efficiency gains was brought forward. For example, it was mentioned that the opportunity to gather all officials from a Member State who worked on the same aspect of project preparation (e.g. feasibility study, state aid, procurement procedure) in order to attend a training by JASPERS led to long-awaited clarifications on issues previously perceived as controversial<sup>120</sup>. Further details are available in Appendix E.

### Efficiency of planning and delivery of horizontal and strategy support services (EQ 12)

Horizontal and strategy support services require a great deal of flexibility on the part of JASPERS in terms of delivery. They may have last several years: the table below shows that according to the *portfolio* review a strategy assignment can last up to 2,606 days. However, there are wide differences within this service type. As shown, assignments to assist in developing strategies or masterplans are particularly likely to be of very long duration (partly due to stakeholder consultations).

Based on the analysis of *sampled assignments*, the direct involvement of JASPERS experts, as for technical advisory support, is not necessarily intensive during the entire period when the

<sup>119</sup> The 'other' theme containing 1 project is not included.

<sup>120</sup> The actual example referred to Spain and the inclusion of requirements related to climate change in all phases of the project cycle.

assignment is open. This could result in efficient resource utilisation (intermittent work by experts on an assignment). However, the risk of inefficiency in resource management may be balanced to some extent by the high knowledge transfer potential reported by the stakeholders interviewed<sup>121</sup>.

Table 5-9 Days of JASPERS involvement in horizontal and strategy services (completed assignments by theme), January 2014–December 2018<sup>122</sup>

	Guidelines	Masterplan/management plan	Monitoring framework	OP preparation	Pipeline preparation	Strategy
Average days	534	899	450	831	645	824
Median days	631	722	419	906	598	624
Maximum days	835	2,231	979	2,015	1,243	2,606
Minimum days	66	344	65	198	133	210
Total days	3,736	8,092	4,047	9,974	6,448	14,008
Number of projects	7	9	9	12	10	17

Source: JADE data for sectors, authors coded the information for themes based on the titles of the assignments

For horizontal and strategy support, it is worth noting (based on *desk research*, *sampled assignments* and partly *country fiches*) that the lack of indications on expected working time and expected deliverables leaves a high flexibility for Member States' to put forward requests within the individual assignments (similarly to technical advisory support), which may ultimately constitute an advantage for the recipients of the support, but not necessarily lead to an efficient delivery.

Ultimately, findings show a co-existence of the following elements: the long duration of assignments under this service type (as highlighted by the *portfolio analysis*); the flexibility granted by JASPERS (as highlighted by *sampled assignments*); the lack of precise indications for the delivery of the services (based mainly on *sampled assignments* and *desk research*). As such, based on a triangulation of the evidence collected from the different evaluation activities, the resulting picture of horizontal and strategy support points to a trade-off between being responsive to the requests of beneficiaries and ensuring efficiency in the use of resources.

### Administrative burden of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support (EQ 13)

For capacity building assignments, the ease of cooperation with JASPERS emerged as one of the advantages of the assistance during the interviews conducted for the analysis of *sampled assignments*<sup>123</sup>. Adding to this, the cost of JASPERS capacity building for beneficiaries is low, because no participation fee applies. The financial cost incurred by the training of participants generally includes only travel and accommodation costs for attending the seminar (depending on its location).

<sup>121</sup> The 2012 AECOM evaluation also recognised horizontal assignments as a key vehicle for knowledge transfer.

<sup>122</sup> Only themes with more than 5 projects are included in this table.

<sup>123</sup> Out of the 3 recipients of capacity building who expressed an opinion on the administrative burden generated by JASPERS capacity-building activities, all of them defined it as low.

For horizontal and strategy support, JASPERS' flexibility was a key positive factor for managing authorities and beneficiaries who generally perceived the relation with JASPERS as an open channel: whenever a new need emerges within the project, JASPERS support is readily available, preventing the loss of time and resources that could otherwise occur. Further, as for technical advisory support, time spent in the interaction is considered part of the learning by doing investment. Beneficiaries' and managing authorities' perception of JASPERS' response time in horizontal and strategy support assignments was also positive<sup>124</sup>.

During the *seminar*, JASPERS' ability to prepare useful tools that facilitate the tasks of national counterparts and become part of their toolkit emerged as a significant advantage, enhancing the recipients' efficiency (with particular reference to the example of Environmental Impact Assessment tools).

#### 5.2.4 Coherence of capacity building and horizontal strategy support

The assessment of the external coherence of JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support explores whether the advice delivered in these two types of JASPERS support is different from EU objectives, especially in the field of climate, environment and state aid and EU guidance (EQ 16 and EQ 18). The second part of the assessment concerns the internal coherence of JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support as well as coherence with other services (external coherence) (EQ 17).

The analysis is performed based on a review of training objectives and materials, assessing whether they are linked to the above-stated areas of EU objectives, complemented by interviews with managing authorities, beneficiaries, and the European Commission. The analysis of horizontal strategy support is done through a review of the objectives, references, and reported outputs of the horizontal strategy support services at assignment level and by considering the opinion of national authorities on the coherence with EU objectives/guidance.

#### External coherence with EU objectives and guidance (EQ 16 and EQ 18)

External coherence of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services examines whether there were overlaps, duplication or other inconsistencies between JASPERS services and EU objectives related to environment, climate change and state aid. The analysis relies on the documentary and interview analysis of the *sampled assignments*.

The *portfolio analysis* shows that most of the capacity-building assignments focus on climate change, which also reflects the specific focus on climate change issues in the current programming period (see Table 5-10). Furthermore, state aid and environment are issues frequently addressed by JASPERS capacity building services.

Table 5-10 Number of capacity building assignments per sector and theme (N=52, completed and ongoing)

	Multi-sector	Rail, air and maritime	Smart development	Roads	Energy and solid waste	Total
Climate change	10	1	-	-	3	14
Urban mobility	2	3	3	1	-	9
State aid	5	1	1	-	-	7

<sup>124</sup> Out of the 10 interviewees (6 managing authorities and 4 beneficiaries) who expressed an opinion on JASPERS' response time in horizontal and strategy support assignments, 9 defined it as either short or reasonable, while only one defined it as long.

	Multi-sector	Rail, air and maritime	Smart development	Roads	Energy and solid waste	Total
Other	4	1	-	2	-	7
CBA	5	-	-	-	-	5
Environment	5	-	-	-	-	5
Networking	2	1	-	-	-	3
Water legislation	1	-	-	-	-	1
Blending	1	-	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>52</b>

Source: JADE data for sectors, authors coded the information for themes based on the titles of the assignments, January 2014–December 2018, extracted in 2019

The analysis of 8 *sampled assignments* focused on whether these are linked to the EU requirements related to environment, climate change and state aid. In all 8 sampled capacity-building assignments<sup>125</sup>, the analysis focused on examining project documentation (training materials, agendas and action completion notes) and found that there were coherent with the EU climate change, environmental and state aid approach and guidance. In other words, at assignment level, there are no instances of overlaps or inconsistencies identified. Coherence of JASPERS capacity building was reflected in the area of EU environment policy and legislation (4 assignments out of 8) by, for instance, providing training on JASPERS' own guidance on climate change, which complements existing EC guidance, and on the EIA Directive and the Directive on Habitats (92/43/EEC).

The review of assignment documentation showed that one factor contributing to coherence with EU guidance is the coordination between JASPERS and the European Commission. For instance, in an assignment concerning a one-day seminar organised by JASPERS on the topic of the state aid legal framework for the 2014–2020 programming period, coherence was ensured by inviting speakers from the Commission (DG REGIO and DG COMP).

While *interviews* with managing authorities and beneficiaries provided limited insight into the extent that JASPERS guidance is coherent with EU objectives and guidance, the *online targeted consultation results* corroborated the assessment of coherence with EU guidance. The majority of respondents (82%) indicated satisfaction to a very large or large extent with the coherence of JASPERS support with other EC guidance such as notes and guidelines<sup>126</sup>.

A review of the objectives, references, and reported outputs of the horizontal and strategy support services was done for the 14 *sampled assignments* to evaluate the coherence with EU objectives/guidance. Within the sampled assignments, environment emerged as a key focus of the horizontal and strategy support assignments (see Table 5-11).

In the sample, all cases (excluding two administratively closed) show that there were no cases where JASPERS services were inconsistent with EU requirements (climate change, environment and state aid and where relevant, EU guidance in other aspects).

Table 5-11 Coherence of HSS assignments with EU objectives and EU guidance (N=12)

<sup>125</sup> One CB was administratively closed and thus not included in the analysis.

<sup>126</sup> Open public consultation question

Coherence with EU objectives and legislation and EU guidance	Number of assignments*
Climate change	2 assignments
Environmental	8 assignments
State aid	3 assignments
Other EU policies	4 assignments

Source: Assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018

\* 2 administratively closed

The data collected and reviewed for the *sampled assignments* shows that JASPERS contributed most often to ensuring coherence with the EU environment approach (8 of 12 sampled assignments). The reviewed documentation reflects JASPERS horizontal and strategy support advice most frequently addressing issues or providing recommendations related to the EU environmental approach (e.g. for assignments on the Development of a National Transport Masterplan in the Smart development sector and for the Evaluation and analysis of public research infrastructure projects assignment in the Smart development sector). The specific pieces of legislation referred to are the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), Natura 2000, the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC) and the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). For instance, in the case of an horizontal and strategy support assignment in Montenegro, the guidance notes shows that JASPERS suggested adding references to the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) to the draft Terms of Reference for the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The managing authorities and beneficiaries interviewed covering 8 of the sampled assignments reported that JASPERS horizontal and strategy support services ensured coherence with EU objectives related to environment, climate change and state aid. They also confirmed that there were no inconsistencies between the guidance provided by the JASPERS horizontal and strategy support services and the guidance provided by the European Commission. This is also confirmed by the Romanian and Croatian *country fiches*, where JASPERS horizontal and strategy support supported the development of EU-financed operational programmes and in meeting an EU ex-ante conditionality (National Transport Strategy in Croatia).

Based on the *portfolio analysis*, in-depth analysis of *sampled assignments*, *country fiches* and *stakeholder consultations* (interviews and online targeted consultation results), the assessment finds that there were no inconsistencies between JASPERS capacity building services and EU objectives and guidance. The coherence of horizontal and strategy support is less direct with EU objectives (EU environment, state aid and climate change) as these assignments are often broader than these objectives and also encompass methodological, planning and strategic approaches (in contrast to capacity building which focus on EU policy objectives).

### External coherence of capacity building with other services (EQ 17)

The analysis of external coherence with other services identified other services based in the sampled assignments and reflects on the degree to which these overlap with JASPERS capacity-building services. The analysis of *sampled assignments* (8) found that in the case of 5 assignments there was evidence of other capacity building services, which did not overlap or duplicate each other. More information on alternative schemes can be found in section 3.6.

*Desk research* conducted within the scope of the sampled assignments found that there were several non-JASPERS seminars on state aid issues in R&D infrastructure projects offered by, for instance, EIPA, Lexxion, as well as national-level institutions, such as the Croatian Institute of Public Administration. In the case of sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMP), there were CIVITAS e-courses and tools provided on the Eltis platform, which were similar to the ones provided by JASPERS. However, in this case JASPERS complemented the existing information by providing interactive workshops, experience from other EU Member States, and the possibility for people working on similar matters to exchange best practices (*interviews*).

The analysis of *sampled assignments* did not find inconsistencies between JASPERS capacity-building services and other services. For example, one of the action completion notes states that 'seminars on state aid issues in R&D infrastructure projects provided by JASPERS were a natural follow-up of a generic workshop organised in Brussels in January 2016 by DG REGIO and COMP, with JASPERS participation'. This suggests complementarity with services provided by the European Commission. In 2 assignments, technical capacity activities financed by Operational Programmes represented other schemes for capacity building and in both cases the OP trainings were complementary to the training provided by JASPERS. *Interviews* with representatives of alternative schemes indicated that JASPERS capacity-building services had complementarity with other services. In the case of EIPA this was highlighted by the fact that JASPERS experts are involved in delivering courses for other schemes. According to an EIPA representative, JASPERS experts are involved because they can offer a combination of technical and practical expertise. Another aspect that differentiates JASPERS services is the fact that other services charge a fee. In the case of the World Bank, the fee is negotiated between the World Bank headquarters and the government requesting the service<sup>127</sup>.

### **External coherence of horizontal and strategy support services with other services (EQ 17)**

The analysis of external coherence with other services identified other services based in the sampled assignments and reflects on the degree to which these overlap with JASPERS horizontal and strategy support services. The analysis of *sampled assignments* (14 horizontal and strategy assignments) found that in the case of five assignments other strategy support services had been involved. This is particularly the case for other EC funded services/projects, for example:

- For a smart grid assignment, the advice provided by JASPERS was coherent with the guidance and advice, which was already provided three years earlier by the EC's Joint Research Centre (JRC).
- In another assignment, complementarity was identified between the JASPERS assignment on the development of a monitoring mechanism for Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) and earlier peer-review workshops in the EC on the design of regional innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) and on RIS3 Governance.
- In one of the reviewed assignments, the action completion notes prepared by JASPERS states that the Serbian Managing Authority is assisted (technical assistance) in the preparation of the programming by an IPA-financed Project Preparation Facility (PPF), delivered by a private consultancy. The documentation shows that complementarity between PPF and JASPERS is pursued, as JASPERS mainly assists with the prioritisation of projects in the relevant sectors and co-operates with the PPF on the prioritisation criteria/model.

<sup>127</sup> Interviews with representatives of World Bank headquarters.

The managing authorities and beneficiaries *interviewed* identified complementarities between JASPERS services and other services (4 horizontal strategy assignments). For example, complementarity was identified in two assignments (cooperation with the S3 platform on the national R&I strategy and with private consultants implementing TA in the transport sector). National authorities covering 2 IPA assignments (identification and compatibility review of priority energy projects in Serbia and CBA workshop in Montenegro) identified alternative HSS services provided by private consultancies. However, due to the lack of knowledge of local needs, the ESIF stakeholders interviewed generally did not consider private consultancies to be as effective as JASPERS (in terms of providing quality support for ensuring coherence) or tailored to the needs of beneficiaries.

### **Internal coherence of capacity building and horizontal strategy support with other JASPERS services**

The analysis of *sampled assignments* (8 capacity building assignments) did not find instances of inconsistencies between JASPERS capacity building activities and other JASPERS services (e.g. technical advisory, other capacity building services, and horizontal and strategy support). As mentioned in the relevance section, the JASPERS Networking and Competence Centre (NCC) has an overview of the training needs and can set up assignments covering one or multiple countries. Thus, the NCC endeavours to ensure that there is coherence (and complementarity) between capacity building (training) and other services provided by JASPERS.

JASPERS transfer of knowledge also takes place through JASPERS technical advisory assignments, which have an important function in terms of on-the-job capacity building for beneficiaries. In terms of complementarity with other services, on-the-job support is considered even more relevant for experienced staff, while workshops are useful for introductory sessions for new staff as indicated during *interviews* with a managing authority. As mentioned by the authorities of an IPA country (Montenegro), on-the-job capacity-building in works and supervision contract management to the IPA Implementing Structure has been provided by JASPERS through ad-hoc support for the transport sector and contributed to the completion of the railway projects and to the absorption of the allocated IPA budget.

In the analysed *assignment sample*, other JASPERS services were identified for only four of the sampled 14 horizontal and strategy support assignments. The analysed assignments show that training was coherent with previous work done by JASPERS and often part of a comprehensive programme. The identified need for the training activity had emerged from preceding training activities (i.e. stage 1 of the training provided to environmental authorities). In the *sampled assignments*, internal coherence with other JASPERS services (e.g. technical advisory, IQR, and capacity building) was ensured by:

- providing multi-country guidance, which is then used for horizontal and strategic support/technical advisory/IQR services (illustrated by the first example below, but also confirmed by the analysis of the 6-country *fiche*<sup>128</sup>);
- high complementarity between horizontal and strategy support and capacity building actions (see the second example in the text box below). Furthermore, from the point of view of Croatian stakeholders, horizontal and strategy support is perceived to contribute to the capacity-building activities, creating synergic learning effects, while Polish stakeholders highlighted the considerable capacity-building element in certain horizontal and strategy support assignments.

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<sup>128</sup> Pronounced in the cases of Croatia and Poland.

More detail is provided in the Second Interim Report, section 4.4.5.

### 5.2.5 EU added value of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support

The evaluation of added value assesses the extent to which JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategic support are bringing EU added value compared to actions taken at national, regional and international level (EQ 19) and provides insight into the consequences arising from the phasing-out of JASPERS advisory services (EQ 20). Data for this assessment derives from interviews in connection with the assignment forms, country fiches, online consultations and seminar.

#### **Added value of JASPERS capacity building (EQ 19)**

The added value of JASPERS capacity building services is perceived to stem from the coherence of training courses with EU requirements, extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements and experience across countries. Compared to alternatives, JASPERS can ensure a homogenous and consistent training delivery across Member States due to its position as an EC-EIB joint initiative. Interviewed beneficiaries (5 beneficiaries covering 4 assignments) confirmed that JASPERS capacity building activities add value compared to national or regional capacity building activities. According to the interviewees, JASPERS added value stems from the coherence of its capacity-building activities with EU requirements, its extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements and its experience across countries. In addition, JASPERS had an important impact on transferring specialised knowledge to beneficiaries, ensuring a wide outreach of capacity building activities (e.g. the sampled 8 completed capacity building assignments resulted in the organisation of 18 workshops reaching out to over 700 people).

In the comments part of the *online targeted consultation* some respondents called for more emphasis on capacity building activities for training the staff of national public administrations or even for project beneficiaries. In addition to training, survey respondents also asked for a higher number of conferences and workshops, especially with the possibility of exchanging international experiences with other Member States.

At the seminar<sup>129</sup> stakeholders emphasised the fact that JASPERS' training events provide a chance to gather officials working on the same issue, leading to long-awaited clarifications on issues that were perceived as controversial. Train the trainer courses were also found effective in achieving knowledge transfer amongst authorities and experts.

#### **Added value of JASPERS horizontal and strategy support (EQ 19)**

Table 5-12 below shows that horizontal and strategy support services are especially used for the development of strategies and preparation of programmes. Based on the analysis of the sampled assignments (14 assignments, out of which four were administratively closed), JASPERS' added value stems from its knowledge of EU legislative requirements, experience across countries and expertise in providing strategy/planning support. All interviewed beneficiaries (covering seven assignments) confirmed that JASPERS horizontal strategy support activities have added value compared to similar national or regional actions. JASPERS' added value is its knowledge of EU legislative requirements, experience across countries and expertise in providing strategy/planning support. In addition to the three elements of JASPERS' added value, the beneficiaries mentioned JASPERS' independence, credibility and local knowledge as important elements of its added value.

Added to this is the fact that JASPERS support is regarded as being more flexible, tailored and adaptable to the needs of the assignment beneficiary and prepared to accommodate additional requests (given that the work is not determined by specific terms of references and contract).

At the *seminar*, some participants noted that more emphasis should be put on horizontal and strategic support, with an increased focus on specific themes such as climate change or financial analysis. Some concerns were also raised about the quality of JASPERS' input.

Table 5-12 *Added value of JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services identified in interviews*

Added value (according to interviewed stakeholders)	Number of interviewed beneficiaries	Number of interviews with managing authorities
Possibility to share and cross fertilise training/experience across countries	1	5
Coherence of trainings with EU requirements	2	-
Extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements/methodological expertise	4	8
Adaptability and flexibility	1	5
Knowledge of national context	-	4
Technical expertise	-	7

Sources: Assignment forms (interviews, added value fiches) January 2014–December 2018

### Comparison with alternative schemes (EQ 19)

Standardised technical training (CBA, state aid, etc.) can also be provided by specialised consultancies, according to the interviews. However, compared to alternative training schemes, the interviews show that, from a content perspective, JASPERS training may offer some relative advantages: high coherence with EU legislation, participation of representatives of EU institutions as speakers, and JASPERS' direct experience with projects. It was mentioned in some of the interviews that JASPERS capacity building activities build on the knowledge of its partners (EC and EIB) and the extensive experience developed in JASPERS since the beginning of its activities in 2006, including its knowledge of local conditions and presence on the ground, as well as its proximity and contribution to EC policy-making. Another strength of JASPERS compared to alternative schemes is that JASPERS can ensure a homogenous and consistent delivery across Member States, due to its particular position as an EC-EIB joint initiative.

*The country fiches* provided a mixed picture in terms of an alternative scheme for capacity building. Some Member States (Italy, Romania) have used alternative schemes for capacity building (Romania: EIB-PASU and Italy: national institutions). In North Macedonia, an EU accession country, there are a number of capacity building initiatives but probably none which specifically focus on investment projects. WBIF was identified as a possible alternative for capacity building. For Poland, no direct alternatives to JASPERS were identified although there are national institutions providing training.

Interviewees (beneficiaries covering 4 assignments (50%) perceive that JASPERS' added value lies in the support given in the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and

prioritisation, support in preparing contract specifications and assistance in co-ordinating external consultants. Beneficiaries can also turn to alternative schemes for horizontal and strategy support. Similar to the alternative schemes identified for technical advisory services (see section 2.6.), horizontal strategy support can be provided to some extent by other schemes (e.g. EIAH, ELENA, Western Balkan Investment Framework) and by external consultants. JASPERS' comparative advantage with respect to the alternative (public or private) schemes lies in its ability to support the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and prioritisation, assistance in preparing contract specifications and with the coordination of external consultants. Some of the elements of horizontal strategy support are more replicable, including the provision of specialised and technical content (e.g. traffic modelling). This type of support could be provided by external consultants, e.g. through framework contracts.

Based on *country fiche* findings, it was only in Italy that managing authorities do not use JASPERS for horizontal and strategic support. The Italian country fiche shows that as regards horizontal and strategic support, Italian authorities have so far preferred to turn to national experts from universities or consultancies because of a well-established working relationships and better knowledge of the local context. Moreover, lack of awareness that this type of services is also offered by JASPERS has played a role as well. The World Bank is supporting a number of sectors in Croatia through different kinds of horizontal/strategy services (e.g. sector analyses, value chain analyses, facilitating the strategic planning process). Horizontal and strategic support services are seen as an important part of the JASPERS service delivery due to the possibility of delivering services upstream. In the other countries (Poland, Slovakia, Romania and North Macedonia) no alternatives to horizontal and strategy support were identified by the managing authorities that were interviewed.

During the *seminar* it was mentioned that JASPERS' uniqueness lies in the provision of support in the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and prioritisation, since such support would be difficult to find on the market with the same level of flexibility. Furthermore, JASPERS' ability to prepare useful tools that facilitate the tasks of national counterparts and become part of their toolkit emerged as a significant advantage.

### **Phasing out of capacity building and horizontal strategy support (EQ 20 and 21)**

Phasing out JASPERS capacity building activities could potentially have a negative impact on the capacity of Member States to deal with evolving EU requirements (for example climate change requirements). In addition, the homogeneity of the training approach and contents across different countries may be affected, leading to variations in the interpretation of requirements across Member States. Most of the interviewed beneficiaries (covering four assignments) believe that phasing out capacity building activities would have a negative impact on their capacity. In terms of substituting JASPERS capacity building activities with national or regional level actions, interviews with beneficiaries (covering two assignments) mention that the training could be provided by external consultants/other organisations.

The beneficiaries interviewed (covering 7 assignments) believe that phasing out horizontal strategy support activities would have a negative impact on the ability of beneficiaries to prepare national/regional master plans and the overall administrative capacity of national authorities. The phasing out may have a different effect as some Member States such as Italy, which does not use horizontal and strategic support services as these are available at national level.

In terms of willingness to pay for JASPERS capacity building activities and horizontal strategy support, both beneficiaries and managing authorities had difficulty answering this question and only a few answers were provided. One beneficiary and managing authorities covering two

assignments indicated that they would be willing to pay for JASPERS. The remaining interviewees did not provide an assessment.

### **5.3 Summary of the assessment of capacity building and horizontal strategy support**

The following section presents the summary of findings concerning review services per evaluation criterion and evaluation questions. The evaluation questions are listed in section 2.1 above.

#### **Relevance**

Capacity building and horizontal and strategy services are generally found to be relevant and responding to the needs of beneficiaries (EQ 2). The analysis shows that JASPERS capacity-building services are largely relevant to meet the needs of the authorities and reflect the initial needs assessment conducted by JASPERS in 2013. Relevant challenges identified by stakeholders include: insufficient tailoring of capacity-building services to non-Major Projects; Furthermore, (particularly in countries with relatively high capacity of national authorities) hands-on capacity building through technical advisory assignments and targeted (e.g. focusing on one sector) training are preferred to more general capacity building courses; more train the trainer courses as they are relevant to the need for achieving knowledge transfer amongst authorities and boosting experts' motivation; more proactiveness on behalf of JASPERS in organising conferences where stakeholders share examples of both good and bad practices, problems and challenges from different projects and countries.

The involvement of JASPERS upstream in the development of strategies and project pipelines through horizontal and strategy support is important as it can pave the way for better prepared projects and more alignment of projects with strategic objectives. Findings suggests that horizontal and strategy support services are a relevant tool to meet the needs of the national authorities requesting support for the preparation of strategies and prioritising projects (EQ 2).

#### **Effectiveness**

The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of capacity building services in terms of the extent to which such services led improvements in the administrative capacity of beneficiaries (EQ 11). Furthermore, the evaluation assessed the effectiveness of the horizontal and strategy support assignments in relation to the extent that such services contributed to setting policy objectives and strategic frameworks in beneficiary countries (EQ 10).

Measuring the effect of JASPERS capacity building services and horizontal and strategy support services has certain limitations since such effects are only visible in the long term (e.g. when the beneficiaries develop projects with the knowledge accumulated through such capacity-building activities or when projects are implemented under the aegis of the new strategies and plans). In this respect, at the end of 2018, 41% of capacity building assignments and 41% of horizontal and strategy support were still ongoing. Furthermore, the ability of beneficiaries to develop projects can be affected by other confounding factors (e.g. whether they also received technical advisory support on specific projects from JASPERS or other capacity-building activities, the a priori capacity of beneficiaries). Bearing in mind these inherent limitations, the evaluation focused on analysing the effects of capacity building and horizontal and strategy support at the level of outputs and results.

For capacity building, the evaluation finds that such activities had a wide outreach (covering between 20 and 300 participants) including a 'multiplier effect' by using the train the trainer concept. Furthermore, the capacity building activities have disseminated knowledge on various topics including climate change (17% of ongoing and completed assignments), environmental

aspects (14%), CBA (8%), state aid (8%) and the multi-sector approach (67%). This was done both via multi-country assignments (30 assignments) and in-country activities (22 assignments). Furthermore, the in-depth analysis of 8 selected capacity building assignments provided data to suggest that JASPERS had a positive effect on supporting the development of the capacity of the beneficiaries. Although the data from the interviews (3), online consultation (57% of respondents) and the seminar highlighted that stakeholders had a positive perception of capacity-building activities, areas for improvements were flagged in relation to further tailoring such activities to smaller countries with a high proportion of non-major projects.

For horizontal and strategy support, the in-depth analysis of assignments, interviews with relevant authorities and the online targeted consultation activities provide an indication that, taken on an individual basis, 83% of the analysed assignments were found to have achieved their initially stated objective when it comes to outputs and results. This included helping Member States fulfil ex-ante conditionalities, supporting beneficiary countries in the development of strategies and master plans (e.g. transport and water) or targeted methodologies (e.g. transport models). However, it is too early to assess whether the assignments also led to wider effects and impacts, such as the development of a pipeline of projects within the context of the master plans or strategies that can be swiftly approved by the Commission or national authorities.

### Efficiency

The administrative burden generated by capacity building assignments is low, according to evidence from interviews with beneficiaries and managing authorities. For capacity building assignments, the ease of cooperation with JASPERS emerged as one of the key advantages of the assistance received based on interviews conducted for the analysis of sampled assignments. Further, the cost of JASPERS capacity building is low for beneficiaries because no participation fee applies. The financial cost incurred by the training for the participants generally only includes the travel and accommodation costs of attending the seminar (depending on its location).

Horizontal and strategy support services ensure a great deal of flexibility for beneficiaries in terms of delivery by JASPERS, but a trade-off emerges between being responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and ensuring efficiency in the use of resources. JASPERS' flexibility was a key positive factor for national authorities who generally perceive the relation with JASPERS as an open channel: whenever a new need emerges within the project, JASPERS support is readily available, preventing the loss of time and resources which could occur otherwise. Further, as for technical advisory support, time spent in the interaction is considered part of the learning by doing investment. Assignments under this service type can have a duration of up to several years, as confirmed by both the portfolio analysis and sampled assignments. In such cases, the calibration of the effort along the entire time horizon of the assignment is left to the discretion of the task manager and follows the requests by the beneficiaries. The administrative burden generated by these assignments is perceived as low by beneficiaries and managing authorities.

### Coherence

Overall, JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategy support activities are assessed to be coherent, both externally and internally. There were no inconsistencies with regard to JASPERS capacity-building services with the EU's climate change, environmental and state aid approach (EQ 16) and guidance (EQ 17). There were no overlaps or duplication between JASPERS capacity-building services and other schemes, and these were thus found to be coherent and complementary with other schemes (EQ 17). Coherence was facilitated by the fact that the capacity-building services are often targeted directly at building up capacity for the EU objectives. JASPERS horizontal and strategy support were found to be coherent to other services. The coherence of horizontal and strategy support is less direct with EU objectives (EU environment,

state aid and climate change) as these assignments are often broader than the objectives and also encompass methodological, planning and strategic approaches (in contrast to capacity building which focuses on EU policy objectives). There were no examples identified of a lack of internal coherence in JASPERS capacity building and horizontal and strategic support with other JASPERS services (e.g. technical advisory, IQR, and capacity building).

### **EU added value**

Stakeholders deemed the EU added value of JASPERS capacity building services to be derived from the coherence of its training with EU requirements, extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements and experience across countries. Compared to alternative schemes, JASPERS can ensure a homogenous and consistent delivery across Member States, due to its position with the European Commission and the EIB. More standard technical training (CBA, state aid, etc) could also be provided by specialised consultancies. While JASPERS capacity building activities ensure uniformity in the approach and contents across the Member States, standard technical training (e.g. on state aid) could be delivered by specialised service providers (EQ 19).

The EU added value of JASPERS horizontal and strategy is perceived to lie in the support in the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and prioritisation (50% of interview beneficiaries). The horizontal strategy support added value stems from expertise in providing strategy/planning support and improvement of project selection. Furthermore, JASPERS' ability to prepare useful tools that facilitate the tasks of national counterparts and become part of their toolkit emerged as a significant advantage. For horizontal and strategy service, comparable services are available and/or used in some Member States which could provide a similar service. However, market alternatives would possibly not have the same flexibility (EQ 20).

## 6 REVIEW SERVICES

This chapter presents the results of the evaluation of JASPERS review services (independent quality review – IQR, and post-submission appraisal – PSA) in the current programming period. The chapter outlines the processes and the portfolio of review services (section 6.1), the findings by evaluation criteria (section 6.2), the key conclusions (section 7.3.) Data gaps and limitations on the findings are presented in chapter 2.3. Given similarities and differences between the IQR and PSA services, the findings are presented, where relevant, per type of review service.

### 6.1 Processes and portfolio of JASPERS review services

The JASPERS **review services** have the overall objective of checking the compliance of ESIF major projects with EU rules and the maturity of major projects submitted under Article 102.1 on pre-submission appraisal (IQR) and Article 102.2 on post-submission appraisal (PSA) of the CPR. The review services should draw attention to issues that need to be resolved before the project is approved by the European Commission. Specifically, the review services aim to provide the European Commission and managing authorities with independent, consistent and timely appraisal of ESIF major projects. The intervention logic of JASPERS, including review services, is presented in chapter 2.

#### 6.1.1 Processes of JASPERS review services

The review services are performed in accordance with the requirements of the CPR, which foresees two modalities for submission of ESIF major projects that require the appraisal of JASPERS<sup>130</sup>:

- **Projects subject to pre-submission appraisal/independent quality review** (IQR) by JASPERS. In line with the working arrangements agreed between JASPERS and DG REGIO, such projects are appraised by JASPERS prior to being notified by the managing authorities to the European Commission under Article 102.1 of the CPR.
- **Projects subject to post-submission appraisal** (PSA) by JASPERS. Such projects are submitted directly to the European Commission under Article 102.2 of the CPR. The European Commission then requests a PSA from JASPERS to check compliance with the requirements of the CPR.

Through the review function, JASPERS appraise major projects (defined in Article 100 of the CPR, see definition in Appendix A on the JASPERS institutional analysis) in line with the quality review criteria included in Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014<sup>131</sup>. The quality review criteria include for example: technical, legal and financial soundness of the project, eligibility of the project, reliability of demand analysis, and adequacy of the technology proposed. The full list of quality criteria that the projects are appraised against is presented in Appendix A of the JASPERS institutional analysis (Appendix A, section A.1.2).

<sup>130</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<sup>131</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 of 3 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

The main difference between the review performed through PSA and the one performed through IQR is the scope of the quality review criteria covered. More precisely, the IQR Division appraises the projects against all quality review criteria in the Commission Delegated Regulation No 480/2014. In comparison, PSA covers all quality review criteria except for the project admissibility verification (completeness check), the ex-ante conditionality and the policy compliance with the priority axis, the verification of compliance with environmental protection requirements and state aid aspects. These criteria are checked by the European Commission. Furthermore, whereas PSAs differentiate between critical issues, non-critical issues and observations, IQRs do not make that differentiation when asking for clarifications on specific issues.

The **processes of the IQR services** are outlined in several documents, i.e. the working arrangements between the European Commission and JASPERS, the working arrangements between JASPERS and the Member States, and the JASPERS Quality Manual. First, the working arrangements between the European Commission and JASPERS outline the responsibilities of the parties involved and include a memorandum of understanding agreed between DG REGIO and DG Environment, a memorandum of understanding between DG REGIO and DG Climate Action and a memorandum of understanding between DG REGIO and DG Competition in relation to JASPERS IQR services<sup>132</sup>. Second, until the end of 2018, working arrangements were also concluded between JASPERS and the Member States for which IQR services are delivered<sup>133</sup>. Pursuant to the Common Provisions Regulation amendment that entered into force (Omnibus Regulation, August 2018), JASPERS and the Member States signed amendments to the working arrangements. Specifically, the amendments outlined that rules concerning the completeness check, the delivery of the IQR Report and the rules for certification of expenditure which stipulated that the Member State could notify the European Commission of expenditure related to the major project upon submission of the project to IQR. Further to the working arrangements, the JASPERS Quality Manual provides details on the procedures and key steps for delivery of IQR assignments.

The procedures outline that the IQR services are requested by the managing authorities in a two-phased procedure. Firstly, the managing authority informs JASPERS of the intention to send a major project through the IQR procedure. Secondly, the project documentation is sent to the JASPERS IQR Division. Once agreed, the working arrangements are reflected in an exchange of letters between the managing authority in a Member States and the IQR Division of JASPERS. The arrangement is then included in the IQR pipeline document that constitutes the future work programme between JASPERS and the managing authority.

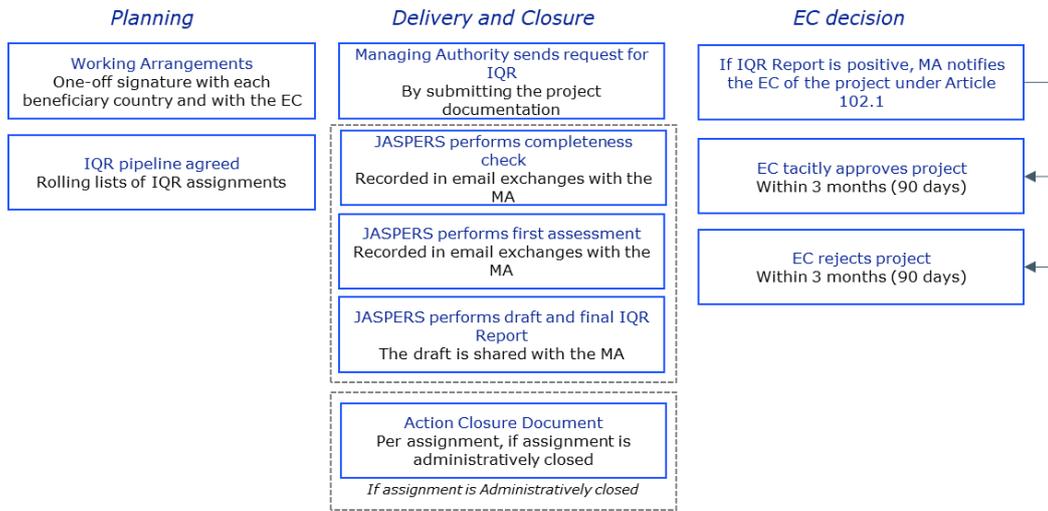
As outlined in Figure 6-1 below, the delivery of an IQR assignment includes several steps.

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<sup>132</sup> Working arrangements agreed between JASPERS and the European Commission in relation to Independent Quality Review and status of the Memoranda of Understanding agreed between DG REGIO and DG Environment, DG Climate Action and DG Competition in relation to JASPERS operations, 14 December 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Croatia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Romania, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom, Slovakia and Slovenia.

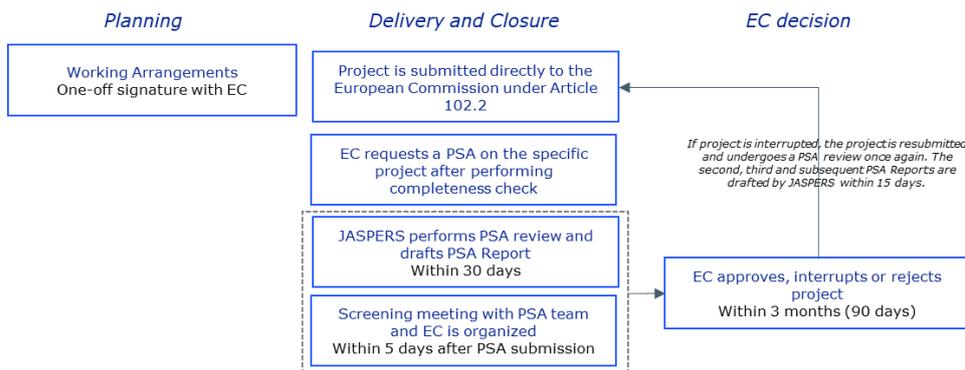
Figure 6-1 Key processes related to IQR services and Article 102.1 notification of major projects



Source: Based on JASPERS Quality Manual, v.1.4

The **processes for PSA services** are similarly codified in the PSA working arrangements between JASPERS and DG REGIO that entered into force in December 2017<sup>134</sup> and in the JASPERS Quality Manual. The ECA report<sup>135</sup> pointed to several deficiencies related to the PSA working arrangements, including lack of a direct reference to Article 102.2 and PSA in JASPERS governance documents and lack of clarity of JASPERS' role in the PSA procedure. Since the ECA report, JASPERS and DG REGIO have worked on developing working arrangements that address the ECA observations. The resulting agreement on the procedures to be followed for PSAs is included in the working arrangements document between DG REGIO and JASPERS agreed upon on 15 December 2017<sup>136</sup>. The document indicates that PSA services are undertaken for projects submitted directly to the European Commission by the managing authorities. Similar to the IQR services, several steps are followed in the appraisal and approval of major projects submitted under Article 102.2 with post-submission appraisal. These are outlined in Figure 6-2 below.

Figure 6-2 Key processes related to PSA services and Article 102.2 notification of major projects



Source: Based on JASPERS Quality Manual, v.1.4; working arrangements for PSA of 15 December 2017

<sup>134</sup> Post-Submission Appraisal working arrangements agreed between JASPERS and DG REGIO, 15 December 2017.

<sup>135</sup> ECA (2018), Special Report no 01/2018 Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) – time for better targeting.

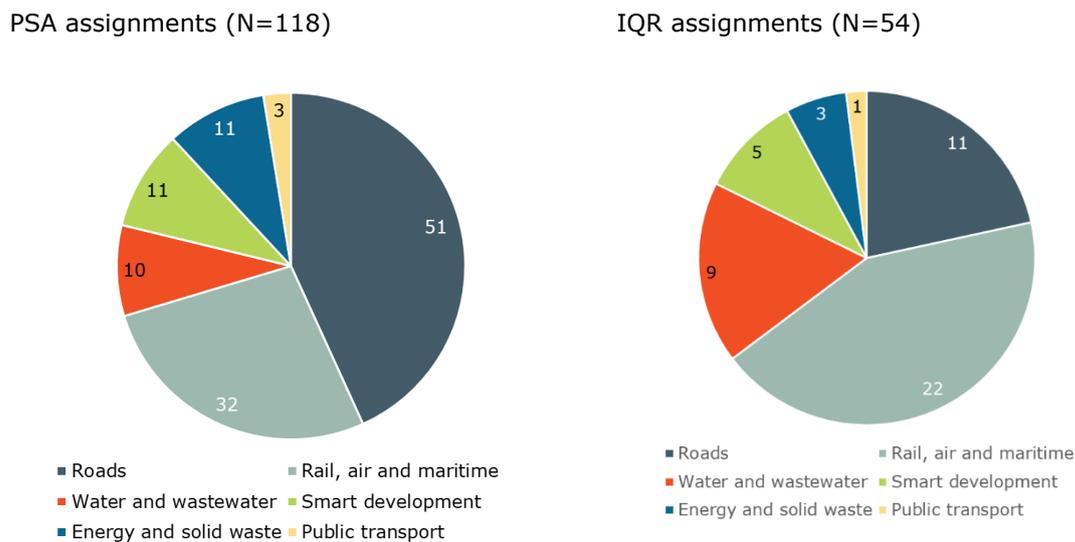
<sup>136</sup> Post-Submission Appraisal working arrangements agreed between JASPERS and DG REGIO, 15 December 2017.

The period for the delivery of the PSA report is set, in principle, as per the working arrangements agreed between JASPERS and DG REGIO on 15 December 2017 at a maximum of 30 calendar days after submission of the documents to the European Commission. Deadlines are subject to negotiation between JASPERS and DG REGIO depending on the workload. Exceptions can be made from the 30-day rule, generally during public or summer holiday periods. The PSA reports are issued with a much shorter deadline than IQR reports and a detailed description of the project is not included. The PSA report concludes whether the major project fulfils the quality criteria and, if applicable, can raise critical issues<sup>137</sup>, non-critical issues<sup>138</sup> and observations<sup>139</sup> to the project documents.

6.1.2 Portfolio of JASPERS review services

The **portfolio of IQR and PSA assignments** completed in the period January 2014 to December 2018 shows that there have been more PSA assignments than IQR assignments. As presented in Figure 6-3 below, a total of 118 PSA assignments<sup>140</sup> were recorded in the JADE database as compared to 54 IQR assignments. A large proportion of appraisal assignments were completed for rail, air and maritime projects (32 PSA and 22 IQR) and roads projects (51 PSA and 11 IQR).

Figure 6-3 Distribution of IQR and PSA assignments across sectors (January 2014–December 2018)



Source: JADE extracted in 2019

<sup>137</sup> Critical issues are defined as 'an instance of not fulfilling the minimum criteria for quality review of Major Projects listed in the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 or of non-compliance with relevant EU legal obligations'. Critical issues in the appraisal process relate to the level of detail and quality of the project documents submitted and the compliance with the requirements of the legal basis (Art. 100 of the Common Provisions Regulation No 1303/2013).

<sup>138</sup> Non-critical issues are defined as 'an instance where the quality standards for the project, or information requirements, are not fully met, but, if these were addressed, would not change the overall positive assessment of the project'.

<sup>139</sup> Observations are defined as 'instances where JASPERS highlights an aspect of the application (which may be compliant with the Regulation) or a horizontal issue that is worth noting as it may have a positive impact on future applications and may be communicated to the national authority concerned by DG REGIO.'

<sup>140</sup> Note that in the SFC 2014, 126 Article 102.2 were recorded for which PSA assignments should have been performed. However, there were only 118 PSA assignments recorded in JADE. The difference is likely to be generated by missing PSA assignments in JADE due to the way the data was manipulated. Furthermore, the JADE database only contained information about first PSAs for a specific major project. The second and third rounds of PSAs are not systematically recorded in JADE and the services are provided under the same JADE number as the first PSA.

In the geographical distribution of IQR and PSA assignments (Table 6-1 below), Poland has the highest number of reviews (93) followed by Romania (13) and Hungary and Slovakia (each with 9). Out of the 118 PSA assignments recorded in JADE, 74 assignments were in Poland. If the PSA assignments in Poland are not taken in account, the picture becomes more balanced in terms of use of IQR and PSA services, with 35 IQRs and 44 PSAs delivered. The portfolio analysis also suggests that 6 Member States have not made use of IQR (Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain), whereas for 6 Member States no PSA services were undertaken (Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta).

Table 6-1 JASPERS IQR and PSA assignments by country (January 2014–December 2018)

	Bulgaria	Croatia	Czech Republic	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania	Malta	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	Total	Tot. excl. PL
PSA	7	-	-	2	-	2	9	5	-	-	-	74	5	7	3	3	1	118	44
IQR	1	7	3	2	2	-	-	2	2	3	1	19	-	6	6	-	-	54	35
Total	8	7	3	4	2	2	9	7	2	3	1	93	5	13	9	3	1	172	79

Source: JADE extracted in 2019

To explain the varying levels of demand for review services two hypotheses were tested. The detailed analysis is presented in Appendix B of the portfolio analysis (Appendix B, B2). The key findings are elaborated in the following.

Firstly, the stakeholders interviewed in the context of the 4 *country fiches* where both PSA and IQR assignments had been completed, and the data from the *seminar* points to an initial limited awareness and initial hesitation of Member States to the 'new' Article 102.1 procedure with IQR (which did not exist under the previous programming period) as a potential explanatory factor for the differences in the demand of IQR and PSA services. As explained by stakeholders, the reluctance of managing authorities to make use of the independent quality review procedure was related to the fact that prior to the Omnibus Regulation (August 2018), certification of expenditure could only be done at the stage of notification of the major project to the European Commission. After the Omnibus Regulation, the rules for certification of expenditure were changed and it was possible for managing authorities to certify expenditure upon submission of the major project to IQR. As further elaborated in Appendix B (text box B-1), these explanatory factors were tested by checking trends over the analysed period in terms of the demand of IQR and PSA services in countries that benefited from a substantive amount of both services (Poland and Romania). Such a comparison could be drawn only in these two countries as the number of PSA and IQR assignments completed in the other countries was too small to observe trends over years. Assuming an incremental awareness and an increased willingness (as a result of the possibility to certify expenditure) of managing authorities to use the Article 102.1 with IQR procedure, an increase in the demand for IQR services should have been observed in the portfolio data over time. However, the portfolio data in these two countries does not show a conclusive picture in terms of increased awareness or increased use of IQR after the Omnibus Regulation. Even when looking at countries which only made use of IQR (Croatia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta), the portfolio data does not support the finding that the possibility for certification introduced by the Omnibus Regulation had an effect on the use of IQR services. 86% (of 15 assignments) in the countries that made exclusive use of the IQR services were done prior to the Omnibus Regulation.

A second explanatory factor indicated in the stakeholder interviews, for the varying levels of demand for IQR and PSA services, was the perception that managing authorities would submit projects under Article 102.2 with PSA in sectors or countries where project preparation capacity was available. The stakeholder interviews highlighted that there was a preference to submit projects under Article 102.1 with IQR for sectors or countries with a limited capacity in project preparation in order to avoid interruptions. This possible explanatory factor was tested with data from both the portfolio analysis and data from the 5 country fiches. Data from the portfolio analysis and interviews with national authorities in Poland indicate that the capacity of the Polish authorities to prepare projects in the road sector is high. This explains the high proportion of road projects that were submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA (44 projects) as compared to Article 102.1 with IQR (3 projects) and the high number of such projects that were submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA and not interrupted (37 out of 44 roads projects in Poland were not interrupted). This finding is further elaborated in Appendix B (see text box B-2). According to managing authorities in Croatia (1) and Lithuania (1) which submitted major projects exclusively through independent quality review and were consulted in the context of the in-depth analysis of assignments and data from the seminar, the submission of projects through independent quality review was a deliberate strategy of the authorities to avoid interruptions and to ensure a level of quality before notification to the European Commission due to the limited capacity of authorities to prepare projects that will not be interrupted. While the finding is valid in the case of the countries where both interviews and the portfolio analysis support it (Croatia, Lithuania), it cannot be generalised to all Member States that made use exclusively of Article 102.2 as other possible explanatory factors could have played a role in those cases as compared to the countries analysed in-depth.

## 6.2 Assessment of the evaluation criteria

In this section JASPERS review (IQR and PSA) services are assessed according to the five evaluation criteria. Each criterion is introduced with an explanation of the criterion in relation to the two services.

### 6.2.1 Relevance of review services

Under the relevance analysis, the IQR and the PSA services are assessed from the perspective of whether the review services meet the needs of the European Commission (EQ 3), and in the case of IQRs also the needs of the Member States (EQ 2). The analysis below is presented per review service type, starting with the IQR service. The main sources of data for the analysis are the portfolio, the assignment forms, interviews and country fiches.

#### Relevance of the Independent quality review services (EQ 3)

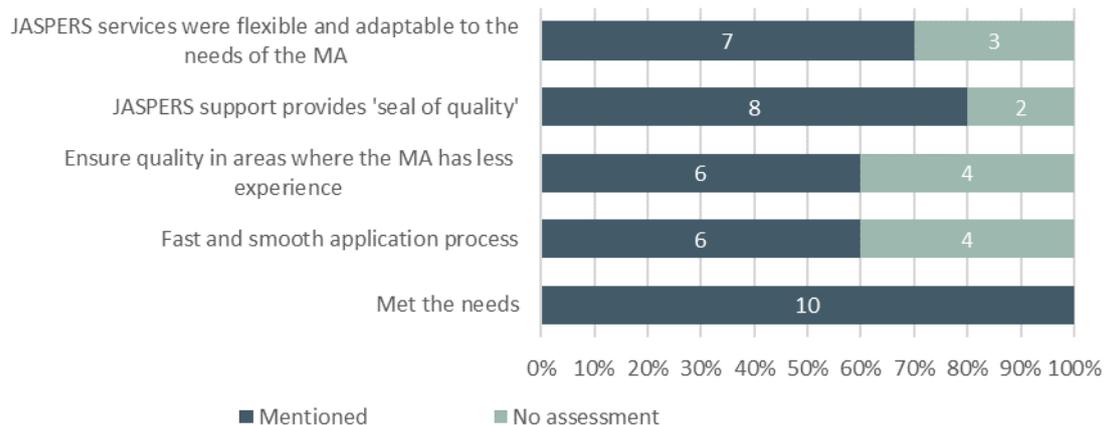
The *portfolio* shows that IQR have had a somewhat lower uptake than PSA, 118 major projects have been submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA and 54 under Article 102.1 with IQR (see Table 2-3). However, the table also shows that a few Member States have exclusively submitted major projects under Article 102.1 with IQR (Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta). If Poland is excluded, the difference between IQR and PSA is less. In the case of Poland, the uptake of IQR changed after the introduction of the Omnibus Regulation in July 2018 (entered into force in August 2018). In 2019, 64% of all major projects were submitted under Article 102.1 with IQR. It should be noted that prior to July/August 2018<sup>141</sup>, requests for payments could only be made once the European Commission was officially notified about the submission of the major project application through the Article 102.2 procedure or after a positive IQR report.

<sup>141</sup> With the introduction of the Omnibus Regulation (EC, Euratom) 2018/1046.

IQR are assessed, by 7 managing authorities *interviewed* (covering seven IQR assignments out of ten) to respond to their needs, as a mechanism to shorten and streamline the overall approval process. Their specific need relates to the possibility of resorting to independent support that can assess whether the quality of the project and the documentation quality is sufficient to be tacitly approved by the European Commission. The reason cited most frequently by the interviewed managing authorities for requesting IQR is the need to reduce the length of approval time. JASPERS is seen as a 'quality stamp' and raises the 'standing' of the project application. This is relevant for both project quality (i.e. substance) and project documentation (formal requirements).

The need of the European Commission for review services relates to the ability to appraise the applications received through Article 102.1 with IQR procedure in a timely and efficient manner. 8 out of 10 *interviewed* representatives from the European Commission reported that the IQR services are relevant for meeting the needs of the European Commission in relation to projects reviews. Generally, projects that are submitted via the Article 102.1 with IQR procedure are considered to be 'problem-free'. 3 out of the 10 interviewees from the European Commission explicitly mentioned that they rely on the assessments made in the IQR/PSA reports.

Figure 6-4 Relevance of JASPERS IQR as mentioned by managing authorities in assignment interviews (N=10)



Source: Assignment forms (interviews), 2019

Analysis of the *country fiches* also shows that countries have developed different strategies in terms of choosing the use IQR or PSA. For the Croatian managing authorities, the preferred submission of major projects is under Article 102.1 with IQR procedure. The IQR provides a proper quality check of the major project and reduces the risk of interruptions in the approval process by the European Commission. In Poland, initial uncertainties in relation to the duration of the process, the certification of payment (see above) and consequences for overall EU fund absorption, lead to hesitance in using Article 102.1 with IQR. As mentioned by some *interviewed* Member States (e.g. Poland and Romania), a clearer understanding of the procedure and the possibility of certifying expenditure under Article 102.1 when submitting the documentation to JASPERS for IQR Review (i.e. before a positive IQR report) increased the attractiveness of the IQR procedure. An interviewee from the Commission (DG REGIO) mentioned that a reason for the lower uptake of IQR could be missing guidance on which review service to select for which projects.

**Relevance of the post-submission appraisal services (EQ 3)**

The main needs of the Commission for review services are to be able to appraise the applications received (through the 102.2 procedure) in a timely and efficient manner. The JASPERS Quality

Manual describes the relevant process map and makes explicit reference to communication with the Major Projects Unit within DG REGIO.

7 out of 10 interviewed European Commission representatives noted that the PSA services meet their needs and addresses capacity and expertise gaps that the European Commission cannot cover internally. According to a *questionnaire* reply received from JASPERS IQR Division, these needs relate to areas such as technical, financial and climate change aspects of major projects.

To further ensure the relevance of PSA services to the European Commission, the setup allows for a thorough assessment of project applications taking into account considerations from both JASPERS experts and European Commission staff prior to the European Commission deciding whether to approve, interrupt or reject projects. The Quality Manual sets out a process map which makes explicit reference to communication with the Major Projects Unit within DG REGIO and refers to 'screening meetings'. At the meetings the JASPERS PSA team discusses applications with all European Commission services involved.

### 6.2.2 Effectiveness of review services

Review services (IQR and PSA) were established with a dual objective, namely: to check compliance of major projects with the applicable regulatory framework, in particular the quality review criteria stipulated in the Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014 and to address weaknesses and delays in the appraisal and approval of major projects that were identified in the previous programming period<sup>142</sup>. A positive IQR or PSA report issued by JASPERS can lead to a tacit approval or adoption of the project provided that the European Commission finds no significant weaknesses<sup>143</sup> with the project. The 'timeliness' (in terms of compliance with regulatory deadlines) of review services is also important. The 'timeliness' of the IQR and PSA services delivered by JASPERS enables the European Commission to take a decision concerning the project to ensure a timely approval and implementation of major projects. Further to the timeliness dimension, the quality of the delivery of review services is important as the results of the review performed under IQR or PSA inform the decision-making process of the European Commission for ESIF major projects.

Considering these overarching objectives, the evaluation assesses several key questions concerning the effectiveness of review services. Firstly, the evaluation assesses the effect of review services in terms of the timeline of appraisal and approval of ESIF major projects (EQ 6) (see section 6.2.2.1). Secondly, the evaluation assesses the effectiveness of review services in terms of highlighting critical issues, in particular issues that have not been previously addressed by JASPERS advisory support (EQ 5) (see section 6.2.2.2). For the purpose of the analysis, timeliness is defined as the ability of JASPERS to provide review services within agreed timelines (as applicable) given the implications a timely / late delivery can have on the timeline of approval and subsequent implementation of major projects. Quality is defined as the ability of review processes to ensure the identification of all relevant (critical) issues related to project documentation and to the maturity and feasibility of projects.

<sup>142</sup> European Commission (2017), Final Audit Report on Major Projects in DG REGIO, 4 October 2017.

<sup>143</sup> Four situations are considered a significant weakness: a) Omission in the IQR report of statements for any of the points of the IQR report requirements; b) A positive statement in the IQR report is not supported by the reasons given for it; c) A positive statement in the IQR report is contradicted by information that is available to the Commission and d) The statements in the IQR report are rendered unreliable due to changes that have occurred between the finalisation of the IQR report and the notification of the major project to the Commission.

### 6.2.2.1 Effect of review services on the timeline of ESIF major projects

The following section presents the key findings concerning the effect of review services (IQR and PSA) on the timeline of ESIF major projects. This is done by assessing the extent to which review services are provided within the regulatory or agreed timelines (where and as applicable) and the extent to which review services have implications on the timeline of approval of ESIF major projects.

#### Effect of independent quality review on the timeline of ESIF major projects (EQ 6)

The assessment of the effect of IQR services on the timeline of ESIF major projects first focused on ascertaining whether such services were delivered in a timely manner, i.e. respecting the deadlines in force. Prior to the Omnibus Regulation there was no time-bound limitation for the provision of IQR services. As of 2 August 2018, the Omnibus Regulation introduced a time limitation of 6 months (180 days) for the delivery of IQR services under Article 102.1 of the Common Provisions Regulation.

The analysis of the *portfolio of IQR assignments* completed in the period January 2014 to December 2018, indicates that such services were delivered on average within 145 days. The duration is counted from the date of the request for independent quality review by the managing authority to the date of the issuance of the IQR report by JASPERS. As shown in Table 6-2, prior to the Omnibus Regulation, data from the portfolio analysis indicates that IQR assignments were delivered within 134 days. However, given the absence of a clear benchmark for the duration of IQR services (no duration in force), the findings are inconclusive concerning the extent to which these assignments were delivered in a 'timely' manner. After the Omnibus Regulation, data from the portfolio analysis suggests that the majority of IQR assignments were delivered within the agreed timeline, thus not affecting the timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects beyond the regulatory duration foreseen for appraisal. Slight delays in the delivery of some assignments (1-3 days for 7 assignments delivered after the Omnibus Regulation) can be explained by the span of these assignments over public holiday periods. When comparing the duration of IQR services before and after the Omnibus Regulation, a high level of variation in the duration of the assignments can be observed for services prior to the Omnibus Regulation (standard deviation  $\pm 111$  days) as compared to the duration of the delivery of IQR assignments after the Omnibus Regulation (standard deviation  $\pm 41$  days). This finding is interpreted as indicative of the fact that the introduction of the 180-day regulatory timeline supported an increased standardisation of the duration of review.

Table 6-2 Elapsed days for IQR services comparison before and after the Omnibus Regulation (N=54\*)

	All IQR assignments	IQR assignments <i>before</i> Omnibus	IQR assignments <i>after</i> Omnibus
Average duration	145	134	180
Median duration	148	91	181
Std. deviation	$\pm 99$	$\pm 111$	$\pm 41$
Maximum duration	455	455	301 <sup>144</sup>

<sup>144</sup> In only one case the duration of delivery of the IQR services was 121 days longer as compared to the 180-day timeline. Given that this assignment was not part of the sample of 90 assignments, the reasons behind this delay are unknown.

Minimum duration	145	27	101
Number of assignments	54	37	14

Source: JADE; calculations based on date of request for IQR and date of IQR report; (\*) data for 3 of the 54 IQR assignments was not available in the JADE database, thus the analysis is performed on 51 assignments.

The evaluation further checked whether the intervention of JASPERS advisory prior to the independent quality review may explain shorter durations of appraisal. According to the Quality Manual (v1.4), in major projects that are supported by JASPERS advisory, the IQR team can engage with the JASPERS advisory team to become familiar with the project. As shown in Table 6-3, the data from the portfolio suggests that independent quality reviews for major projects that are assisted by JASPERS advisory have a shorter duration of appraisal (by 108 days) than IQR assignments for major projects that were not assisted by JASPERS advisory. This was the case both for IQR assignments before and after the Omnibus Regulation. This finding was also reflected in the *interviews* with JASPERS representatives (particularly the interviews with representatives from the IQR Division as well as representatives of other sector-specific divisions) who highlighted that the involvement of JASPERS advisory in the preparatory phases is important for ensuring an efficient review process and early alignment of the major project with the requirements of the European Commission.

Table 6-3 Average duration (days) of IQR services (completed IQR assignments) for major projects assisted or non-assisted by JASPERS advisory (N=54\*)

	Before Omnibus Duration (# projects)	After Omnibus Duration (# projects)	Overall Duration (# projects)
Assisted major projects	108 (32)	172 (6)	118 (38)
Non-assisted major projects	290 (5)	186 (8)	226 (13)

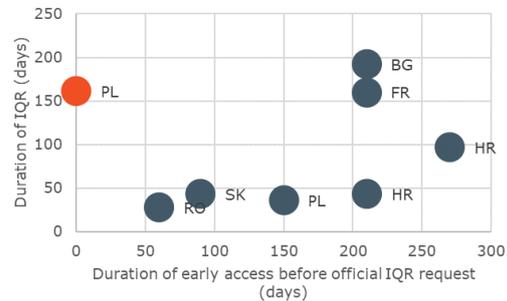
Source: JADE; calculations based on date of request for IQR and date of IQR report; (\*) data for 3 of the 54 IQR assignments was not available, thus the analysis is performed on 51 assignments.

The evaluation further investigated whether early involvement of the IQR Division in the review of the project documentation influences the duration of IQR assignments. When a major project receives JASPERS advisory support in the preparatory phases, the IQR team can gain access to the project documentation before the formal request for IQR by the managing authority. This enables the IQR Division to do an initial appraisal of the project before the formal request is issued. According to the JASPERS Quality Manual, involvement of the IQR experts is agreed with JASPERS advisory on a case-by-case basis. The manual recommends that at least 6 months before submission of a project to the IQR Division, the IQR team is made aware by the managing authorities of the key documentation prepared and the overall status of the project. However, the manual does not elaborate further details (e.g. whether full access to the project documentation is granted to JASPERS by the managing authorities). The explanations provided by JASPERS<sup>145</sup> indicated that interactions take place prior to the formal IQR request in almost all JASPERS advisory supported projects. This interaction includes, for example: exchanges to clarify compliance issues; peer-review of documentation by JASPERS; assisting with regulatory issues by JASPERS; and reviewing of draft studies by JASPERS.

<sup>145</sup> As per explanation provided by JASPERS via email, dated 07.10.2019.

While data concerning the 'early involvement' of the IQR Division is not available at portfolio level<sup>146</sup>, this data was compiled for the *sample of IQR assignments* (9 IQRs). As shown in Figure 6-5, the link between early access and duration of the IQR process is inconclusive. In *interviews* with JASPERS representatives and written comments from JASPERS IQR, representatives stated that early access is important for an efficient and fast appraisal. More elaboration on the findings concerning early access of the IQR Division to project documentation and the duration of appraisal are presented in the Second Interim Report (section 4.2.2.2).

Figure 6-5 Duration of early access (days) compared to duration of IQR process (days) for the sample of 9 IQR assignments



Source: JADE and JASPERS data. Note: in red, project for which IQR did not have early access; in blue, projects for which IQR had early access to the project documentation

The evaluation also assessed the effects of the duration of IQR services on the *timeline of appraisal and approval of projects* as the duration of IQR may have implications on the overall timeline of appraisal and approval of the project. Once the IQR is completed and a positive IQR report is produced by JASPERS, the major projects are notified to the European Commission by the managing authorities and the approval procedure is commenced within the European Commission. According to the CPR (Article 102.1), the European Commission then decides to approve or refuse co-financing for the selected major project within three months of the date of notification. The analysis of the portfolio of major projects that were subject to IQR indicates that the average duration from request for IQR to European Commission approval<sup>147</sup> was 216 days. When comparing major projects submitted before and after the Omnibus Regulation, the overall average time of appraisal and approval by the European Commission of projects submitted before the Omnibus Regulation was lower (123 days) as compared to those submitted after the Omnibus Regulation (251 days). This can be explained by the overall lower average time of the independent quality review of projects in the period prior to the Omnibus Regulation.

*Interviews* with managing authorities consulted in the context of the sample of 13 IQR assignments showed mixed perceptions on the effect of IQR services on the timeline of major projects (4 indicated positive effect, 2 indicated negative effect and 7 provided no assessment). European Commission representatives were also asked to assess the effect of JASPERS IQR services on the timeline of projects. All 6 interviewed representatives considered the Article 102.2 procedure to have shortened the timeline of project approval when comparing to the previous programming period.

To sum up, although stakeholder opinions point to the fact that major projects notified under Article 102.1 with IQR have shortened the duration of appraisal and approval, such statements were mostly made when comparing the current period with the previous period. The data from the portfolio points to the fact IQR services after the Omnibus Regulation were delivered by JASPERS within the regulatory deadline by JASPERS in 43% of assignments or with minor delays (1-3 days) in 50% of assignments. However, the data also indicates that, on average, the IQR procedure has not led to a shorter timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects (when compared to the PSA procedure) and the introduction of the time limitation of 180 days appears

<sup>146</sup> This data is not collected in the JASPERS databases and such data was manually collected from email exchanges between the IQR Division and managing authorities for the in-depth assignment analysis.

<sup>147</sup> From formal submission of the project application to the IQR Division up to approval by the Commission.

to have standardised the timeline of delivery of such assignments but also resulted in IQR assignments being delivered using the maximum time allowed (when compared to assignments delivered in the period prior to the Omnibus Regulation).

### Effect of post-submission appraisal on the timeline of ESIF major projects (EQ 6)

The assessment of the effect of JASPERS PSA services on the timeline of projects first focused on assessing whether such services are delivered within the agreed deadlines. As mentioned above (see section 6.1.1 above), PSA assignments are to be completed by JASPERS generally within 30 days from the request for appraisal from the European Commission<sup>148</sup>. The time period is counted from the date of submission of the project documentation to the European Commission up to the delivery of the PSA report by JASPERS.

Data from the *portfolio analysis*, indicates that such services were delivered by JASPERS on average within 32 days. Further analysis indicates that 57% of the PSA assignments were completed within the 30 days deadline. For 43% of the PSA assignments (50 PSAs), the duration of completion was above 30 days. For these assignments, the evaluation investigated whether the exceedance can be explained by overlap of the assignments with the holiday period. For 40 of the 50 PSA assignments that had a higher than 30-day duration, the explanation for the exceedance can be attributed to overlap with holiday periods<sup>149</sup>. Amongst the remaining 10 of the 50 PSA assignments that had a higher than 30-day duration, 6 assignments covered Poland and 2 Bulgaria, and these assignments most often were in the roads sector (5 assignments) and rail, air and maritime (3 assignments). However, the exceedances of the 30-day limit were small. 9 of the 10 assignments had an exceedance of the deadline in the range of 1 to 4 days, whereas 1 of the 10 assignments had a duration of 78 days. The explanations for these exceedances are unclear as the assignments were not part of the sample. However, as per the Quality Manual (v1.4) and working arrangements between JASPERS and DG REGIO, the 30-day deadline can be changed upon agreement between JASPERS and DG REGIO. Further elaboration on these findings and the data is presented in Appendix B of the portfolio analysis.

Table 6-4 Average duration (days) of PSA services (N=118)

Duration of the PSA services	Avrg	Min.	Max.	Number of major projects with duration lower or equal to 30 days	Number of major projects with duration higher than 30 days	Total number of major project PSAs
PSA duration	32	16	78	68 (57%)	50 (43%)	118

Source: JADE, calculations done based on the date of the request for PSA and date of the PSA report.

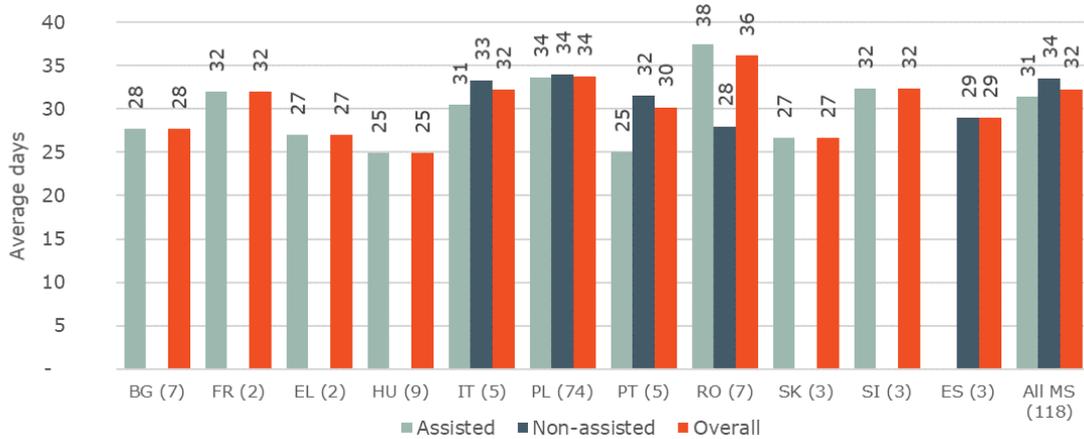
The evaluation further assessed whether the involvement of JASPERS advisory services in the preparatory phases may have a positive effect on the appraisal timeline, i.e. the assumption would be projects that were also assisted by JASPERS advisory would be better prepared in line with the requirements of the European Commission. The portfolio analysis is inconclusive in this regard. The portfolio includes both countries where assisted projects had on average a longer duration of

<sup>148</sup> According to the working arrangements between JASPERS and the European Commission, deadlines for PSA are subject to negotiation with DG REGIO, but most reports will have to be delivered within the 30-day deadline in order to facilitate a Commission decision within 90 days according to the CPR

<sup>149</sup> Christmas holiday period: assignments covering end of December to beginning of January. Summer holiday period: assignments covering the month of August. It is foreseen in the working arrangements between the European Commission and JASPERS that the 30-day deadline applies except for longer holiday periods.

appraisal (e.g. Italy, Portugal) as well as countries where non-assisted projects were appraised within the same duration as assisted or even faster. This is shown in Figure 6-6 below.

Figure 6-6 Average duration (days) of PSA services from request of PSA to PSA report (completed assignments) for assisted and non-assisted projects



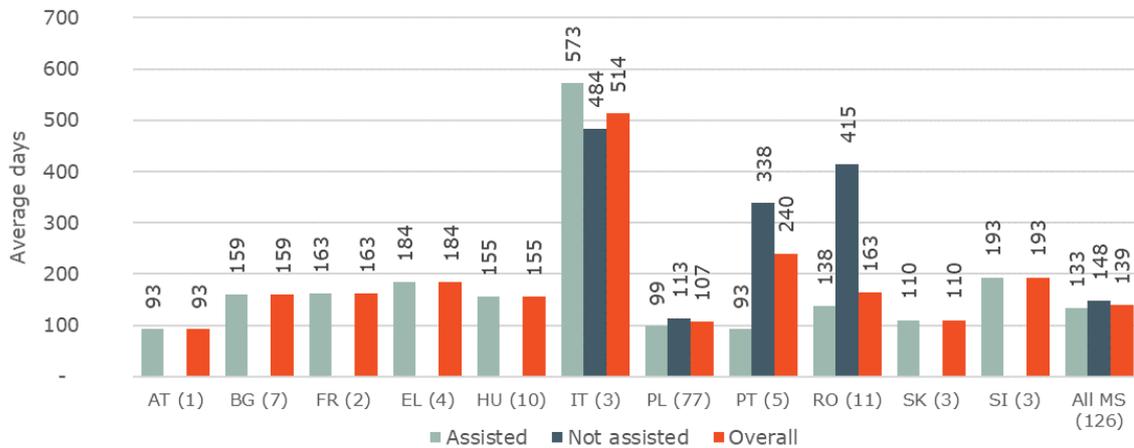
Source: JADE, calculations done based on the date of the request for PSA and date of the PSA report.

Similar to IQR assignments, the duration of appraisal performed by JASPERS may have implications on the overall *timeline of appraisal and approval* of the project. Once a major project is appraised, the project goes through the European Commission approval process, where the Commission must approve, reject or interrupt the project within 90 days. Assessing the full timeline of appraisal and the Commission decision, findings from the portfolio indicate that the introduction of the PSA services has a positive effect on the timeline projects. As presented in Figure 6-7, major projects submitted to the European Commission through the Article 102.2 procedure with PSA were appraised and approved, on average, within 139 days. Compared to projects that were submitted under Article 102.1 and underwent IQR, major projects submitted via the PSA procedure were appraised and approved 77 days faster<sup>150</sup>. This can be explained by the fact that the duration of the PSA process is shorter than the duration of the full IQR process (30 days compared to 180 days). Even through major projects submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA are susceptible to interruptions, the average duration of interruption was only 86 days. Furthermore, the number of projects in the portfolio that had more than one interruption was limited, which can be explained by the 'one interruption' rule of the European Commission (i.e. that major projects should not be interrupted more than once)<sup>151</sup>. These findings suggest that, provided the major projects are delivered in sufficiently good quality so as not to be subject to interruptions, projects that undergo post-submission appraisal are on average appraised and approved more quickly.

<sup>150</sup> Average appraisal and approval of major projects under Article 102.1 was 216 days whereas average appraisal and approval of major projects under Article 102.2 was 139 days.

<sup>151</sup> As per explanations in interviews with DG REGIO representatives which flagged the existence of such an internal rule.

Figure 6-7 Average duration of approval of Article 102.2 ESIF major projects (N=126)



Source: JADE and SFC2014, calculations are based on the total duration of the approval timeline from submission of the project to the European Commission including interruptions and incomplete submissions up to adoption by the European Commission.

In *interviews* with 10 European Commission representatives it was stated that PSA services were delivered in line with the working arrangements between the European Commission and JASPERS. Observations from beneficiaries and managing authorities consulted in the context of the sample of selected PSAs (10) are less conclusive concerning the effect that PSA services had on the timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects (2 indicated positive effect, 3 indicated negative effect because of the multiple rounds of interruptions and 5 provided no assessment). Based on the results of the interviews, it was noted that the interruptions can influence the perception of beneficiaries and managing authorities that JASPERS generates delays in the approval of projects.

In summary, overall PSA services were delivered by JASPERS within the timeline agreed in the working arrangements with the European Commission. Exceptions to this can be explained by the overlap between the PSA services and holiday periods. Furthermore, when comparing the overall timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects undergoing post-submission appraisal with those undergoing independent quality review, the evidence from the portfolio points to the fact that major projects with post-submission appraisal are approved faster. This is due to the shorter timeline of the post-submission appraisal, the reduced number of interruptions and the fairly low average duration of interruptions.

### 6.2.2.2 Effectiveness of review in identifying issues with ESIF major projects

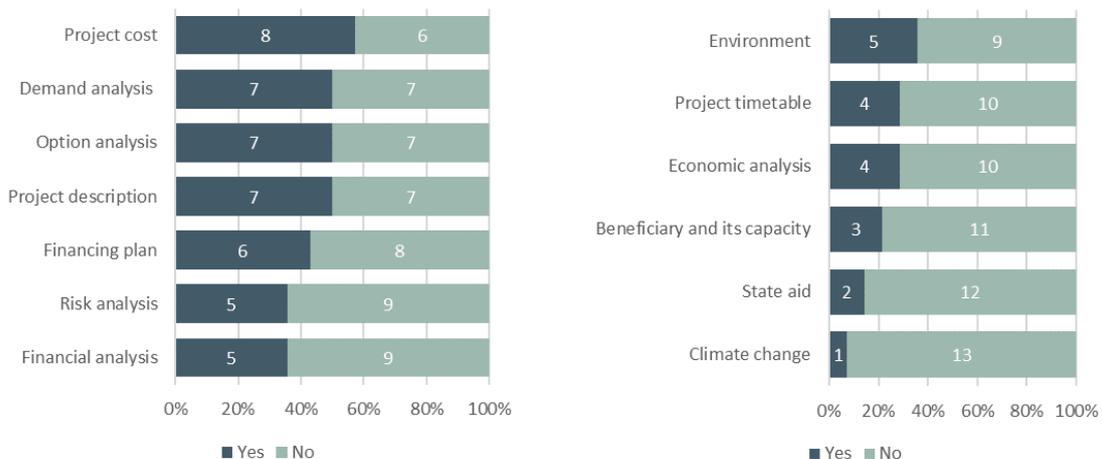
#### Effectiveness of independent quality review (EQ 5)

One of the key objectives of IQR services is to perform an appraisal of the major projects and of major projects' documentation in line with the established quality review criteria included in Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014 (see detailed presentation in Appendix A, section A 1.2). In this process, JASPERS provide an independent quality review of the major project and project documentation and clarifies outstanding issues with the managing authorities. Once the project is notified to the European Commission together with the IQR Report by the managing authorities, the European Commission carries out a completeness check and quality check of the IQR report and of the application form. If no significant weaknesses<sup>152</sup> are identified in the IQR report, the project is considered tacitly approved by the European

Commission within 3 months (90 days) of the date of submission. In duly justified cases the European Commission can also take a decision prior to the 90-day deadline.

As shown in the figure below, data collected through the in-depth analysis of IQR information (completeness checks and first assessments<sup>153</sup>) for the sample of 14 IQR assignments shows that IQR services requested clarifications or identified issues concerning the project application and the supporting documentation, and/or highlighted missing or inconsistent elements in the project documentation. Across the 14 IQR assignments, JASPERS identified issues that required clarification issues in over 50% of the cases concerning the project cost and in 40-50% of the cases on the demand analysis, option analysis and project description. There was no example amongst the 14 assignments where IQR did not request any clarifications on specific issues during the completeness checks and first assessments (see procedures as explained in section 6.1.1 above). The data is insufficient to conclude whether the intervention of JASPERS advisory prior to the appraisal has any effect on the number or type of issues raised. Specifically, this is due to the small sample that covered primarily IQRs for major projects that had been assisted by JASPERS before appraisal (13 out of 14 assignments). For the sample of analysed IQR assignments, JASPERS requested clarifications and flagged issues during the completeness check and the first assessment on between 1 (Croatia; water and wastewater project) and 10 (Latvia; smart development) aspects.

Figure 6-8 Overview of aspects on which JASPERS IQR identified issues that required clarification for the sample of IQR assignments (N=14)



Source: IQR completeness checks and first assessments

N includes 13 completed and 1 administratively closed assignment<sup>154</sup>

The analysis of the completeness checks and first assessments revealed that the clarifications and issues raised by JASPERS IQR were mostly related to gaps or consistency issues in the project documentation. Specifically, issues raised in the completeness checks related primarily to missing documentation or incomplete information on the CBA. Issues raised in the first assessments related primarily to the consistency of different parts of the project applications or clarifications and confirmations, for example in relation to the applicability of certain rules (e.g. state aid) or eligibility of costs. In 2 of the 14 cases in the sample, IQR raised issues with the projects which

<sup>153</sup> Completeness checks and first assessments are performed by JASPERS IQR and the results are recorded in email exchanges between JASPERS IQR and the managing authorities.

<sup>154</sup> The administratively closed assignment is included in the analysis as JASPERS reviewed the documentation and provided the managing authority with an initial opinion on the assignment.

related to compliance with the EU rules, particularly the application of the CBA requirements, the approach to performing the option analysis and scoping the project. In one of the two cases, the issues were solved with support from JASPERS advisory and the project was notified to the European Commission under Article 102.1 being subsequently tacitly approved. In the other case, the managing authority decided to withdraw the project and to re-submit it under Article 102.2 with PSA under which the certification of expenditure could take place at the moment of the submission of the major project (as the project approval was done prior to the Omnibus Regulation). However, because the project had been submitted prior to the resolution of critical issues, which were also identified by IQR, the project was interrupted by the European two times. These adjustments of the major project led to a reduction in scope and costs. The technical advisory support provided by JASPERS in the period between the interruptions enabled the final approval of the project by the European Commission.

In principle, a positive IQR report leads to a tacit approval by the European Commission. JASPERS issued positive IQR reports for all the 13 major projects in the analysed sample of IQRs. As explained by JASPERS, IQR issues a positive report in almost all cases of review as critical issues are normally resolved before the formal IQR assessments. In exceptional cases, defined in the CPR, the European Commission can reject a project if significant weaknesses<sup>155</sup> are identified in the IQR report. At the moment of drafting this evaluation report, there were no such cases (neither in the sample analysed, nor in the portfolio). In practice this indicates that the European Commission accepts the quality check performed by IQR.

Further to issuing the IQR report, as of 2018<sup>156</sup> JASPERS is also required to perform a consistency check of the documentation notified to the European Commission, including Part A of the project application, with the IQR reports. Prior to this requirement being introduced, JASPERS was not responsible for checking the project application. The in-depth analysis of the sample of 14 IQR assignments revealed two cases of major projects where the European Commission issued a letter of incomplete submission due to missing elements in the notification document (application form, Part A). No cases of IQR assignments completed after the introduction of the requirement to check the project application were analysed in the sample, so an assessment of the effect of this new requirement cannot be performed. In *interviews* with the managing authorities for the sample of selected assignments (13 IQRs) and with the European Commission representatives (10 representatives) most stakeholders indicated that JASPERS IQR services have been delivered in line with the requirements and agreements with the European Commission and have been effective in identifying issues in the projects and in the project documentation.

To sum up, the findings from the sample of selected assignments and from the interviews indicate that IQR services perform a quality review of projects in line with the agreements with DG REGIO. Based on the sample of IQR assignments analysed, the issues identified by JASPERS are found to be predominantly related to aspects requiring further clarifications from the managing authorities or raising consistency issues in the project documentation.

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<sup>155</sup> Four situations are considered a significant weakness: a) Omission in the IQR report of statements for any of the points of the IQR report requirements; b) A positive statement in the IQR report is not supported by the reasons given for it; c) A positive statement in the IQR report is contradicted by information that is available to the Commission and d) The statements in the IQR report are rendered unreliable due to changes that have occurred between the finalisation of the IQR report and the notification of the major project to the Commission.

<sup>156</sup> According to the JASPERS Quality Manual (section 14.11 of versions v 1.2, v.1.3, v 1.4 of the Quality Manuals), to ensure the consistency of the documentation notified to the European Commission with the IQR procedure, the IQR team verifies Part A of the notification of the selected major project. Verification of Part A of the notification is carried out, at the latest, before sending the final IQR report to the managing authority.

### Effectiveness of post-submission appraisal (EQ 5)

Post-submission appraisal services have the overall objective of appraising projects in line with the quality criteria and acting as a filter in identifying issues (critical, non-critical and observations) in the major projects.

As presented in Table 6-5 below, across the sample of 21 PSA assignments (concerning 21 major projects) analysed in the context of this evaluation, 42% (9) of PSA reports provided a positive appraisal with no critical issues: 5 of the PSA reports that contained no critical issues, were related to major projects in Poland covering rail, air and maritime (3 projects), water and wastewater (1 project) and road (1 project). 4 of the PSA reports that contained no critical issue were related to projects in Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary covering various sectors. All nine major projects that had received a positive appraisal, with no critical issues had received assistance from JASPERS advisory in the preparatory phases, apart from one project in the roads sector which had been submitted without JASPERS assistance.

In the remaining 12 cases (58%) where PSA services identified critical issues, the data collected from those PSA reports indicates that, on average, PSA services have identified 4.4 issues in projects that had been assisted by advisory prior to their submission to PSA. For major projects that had not been supported, PSA services identified on average 7.3 such critical issues (see Table 6-5 below). This finding points to that advisory services can have a positive effect in improving the quality of the projects.

To assess the extent to which critical issues are addressed by the review function of JASPERS, a comparison was made of issues raised in the PSA reports and in interruption letters issued by the European Commission. The comparison relied on a mapping of critical issues, non-critical issues and observations in the PSA reports and the issues listed in the interruption letters and a comparison of differences between the two (which is further elaborated in the Second Interim Report and the assignment fiches). A key limitation for this analysis is the fact that whereas the categorisation of critical and non-critical issues in the PSA reports is distinct, the issues raised in the interruption letters from the European Commission are not categorised as critical or non-critical. However, the methodology applied assumed that if issues are important enough to be mentioned in an interruption letter, they can be considered as critical.

A comparison was made between the number and type of issues raised in the interruption letters for the sample of analysed PSA assignments. As presented in Table 6-5 below, the data suggests that interruption letters raised on average more issues than PSA reports for both JASPERS advisory assisted (on average 4.5 critical issues in PSA reports and 5 issues in the interruption letters) and JASPERS non-assisted projects (on average 7.3 critical issues in the PSA reports and 8.8 issues in the interruption letters). However, in all cases where interruption letters raised more issues, as compared to the number and type of critical issues in the PSA reports, the issues raised in the interruption letters were raised as non-critical or as observations in the PSA reports. Thus, the difference can be explained by the interpretation of criticality of issues by the PSA team as compared to the European Commission<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>157</sup> This finding must be contextualised given that, as elaborated above, there is no clear differentiation in the interruption letters between critical issues, non-critical issues, and observations in the interruption letters. The comparison is done between critical issues in the PSA Reports and all issues in the interruption letters. The comparison is done on the assumption that if an issue is sufficiently important for the European Commission to be flagged in an interruption letter and warrant and interruption of the project, then it may be considered comparable to a critical issue.

For example, in a major project in Italy, the PSA report flagged issues related to lack of information on potential overlap of networks deployed as non-critical. This issue was then taken over in the interruption letter by the European Commission (it was seen as sufficiently critical by the European Commission to warrant the need to interrupt the project). Similarly, in another major project in Spain, the PSA report raised 11 critical issues. The first interruption letter by the European Commission communicated all 11 issues to the managing authority plus an additional issue identified by DG REGIO (related to the lack of certificates proving compliance with the Water Framework Directive).

Table 6-5 Number of critical issues raised in PSA reports and interruption letters (N=21)

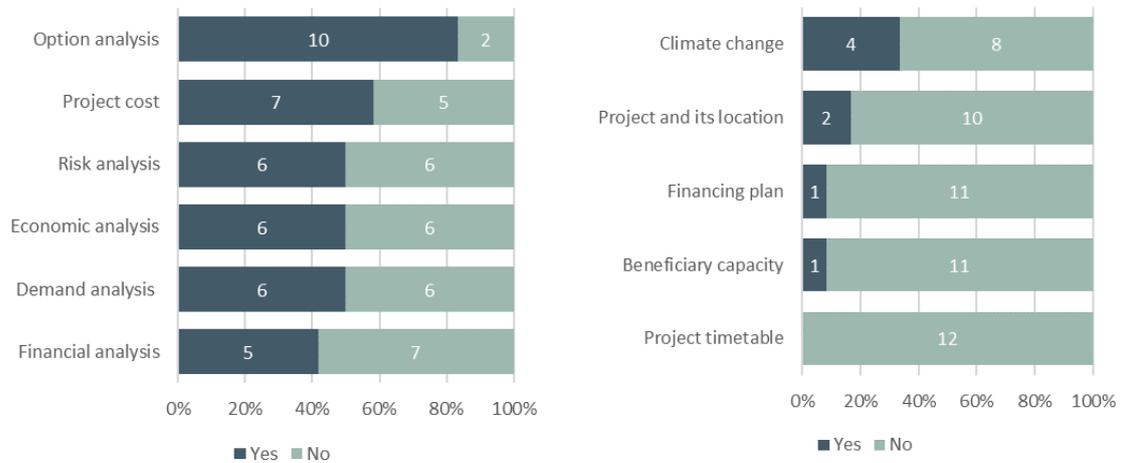
	# of critical issues in PSA Report 1		# of critical issues in interruption letter 1	# of critical issues in PSA Report 2		# of critical issues in interruption letter 2	# of critical issues in PSA Report 3
Assisted	Average	4.5	5	1.5	3.3	2	
	# projects	8	11	4	3	1	
Non-assisted	Average	7.3	8.8	4.5	3.3	2.5	
	# projects	4	4	2	3	2	
Average # critical issues for advisory <b>non-assisted</b> projects		7.3 (4 projects)		Average # critical issues for advisory <b>assisted</b> projects		4.4 (8 projects)	

Source: PSA reports and interruption letters (detailed analysis in Second Interim Report)

As presented in Figure 6-9, the analysis of critical issues raised in the PSA reports for the sample of PSA assignments (where critical issues were raised) indicates that, most often, critical issues raised in PSA reports concerned option analysis (83% of cases where critical issues were raised), project cost (58% of cases), risk analysis, economic analysis, and demand analysis (50% of cases). PSA reports raised no critical issues related to the project timetable and procurement and only raised significant issues in one project related to the beneficiary's capacity and the financing plan.

The option analysis, risk analysis, economic analysis, and demand analysis were frequently critical issues in project applications and were raised both in the case of projects in 'old' JASPERS beneficiaries (Poland, Romania, Hungary) as well as 'new' beneficiaries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, France). Furthermore, the critical issues were raised in various sectors and for both assisted and non-assisted projects. The critical issues were raised in various sectors and for both JASPERS advisory-assisted and non-assisted projects (see Figure 6-6 above).

Figure 6-9 Critical issues identified in PSA reports for the sample of analysed PSA assignments (N=12, PSA reports where critical issues were identified)



Source: PSA reports

In *interviews* with Commission representatives (10) it was assessed that JASPERS has an important effect in the identification of critical issues and that PSA services can act as an important filter for assessing the quality of projects. Amongst the consulted managing authorities (covering 8 of the 12 assignments), 5 explicitly pointed to the effect of JASPERS in terms of providing a 'seal of quality' (i.e. that the project was in line with the requirements of the European Commission). Similarly, in the *seminar*, representatives highlighted the fact that the PSA service was instrumental in ensuring a smooth and consistent high-quality appraisal.

In summary, based on the in-depth assessment of PSA assignments, interviews and the seminar, the findings indicate that PSA services identify critical issues in the assignments analysed. However, a closer examination and comparison of PSA report with interruption letters found that interruption letters raised (on average) more issues as compared to the number of critical issues identified in the PSA reports. This difference can be explained by the fact that the Commission interruption letters raise issues that are not per se classified as critical issues, but they were, in the opinion of the Commission, important enough to justify the interruption of the project.

### 6.2.3 Efficiency of review services

The analysis of the efficiency of review services assesses their planning and delivery (EQ 12) as well as the generated administrative burden (EQ 13). From a planning perspective, the analysis looks into whether JASPERS arrangements (and their evolution) are conducive to an efficient delivery of both IQR and PSA services. On service delivery, specific aspects of IQR and PSA are addressed as relevant: for IQR, the interaction of JASPERS IQR with other actors (managing authorities, JASPERS advisory); for PSA, the monitoring of resources spent. The average duration of both is also addressed. To examine the extent to which JASPERS activities generated an administrative burden, the assessment is based mainly on the perception of the support recipients: managing authorities and beneficiaries for IQR, the European Commission for PSA.

#### Efficiency of planning and delivery (EQ 12)

IQR working arrangements have been in place since December 2018 to enhance transparency and accountability (see also 6.2.2). Compared to PSA, and given the nature of IQRs, the working arrangements (see 6.1.1) do not specify in detail the type of activity to be carried out by JASPERS IQR nor the required expertise. Thus, apart from the provisions of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014, the flexibility characterising technical advisory services is to some extent present in IQR assignments as well.

However, the working arrangements also set out that on projects previously assisted by JASPERS advisory, IQR experts can discuss with advisory experts to clarify any complex issues or potential misunderstandings. Pursuant to the Omnibus Regulation, an addendum to the IQR working arrangements with Member States has been added which supports the efficiency of the process. First, it institutionalises a former good practice in terms of introducing a completeness check email to be sent to the Member State after having received project documentation. Second, it clarifies that a project that has received advisory assistance cannot be submitted to IQR until the action completion note has been issued. This clarifies and streamlines the roles of JASPERS IQR and JASPERS advisory. A time limit of 180 days for the delivery of the assignment is also introduced after Omnibus. The final IQR report is bound by the template provided in the above delegated acts.

As regards arrangements with Member States, the Country Action Plan does not include IQR services although they are delivered to managing authorities, like the other JASPERS service types included in the Country Action Plan. From an analytical perspective, the lack of IQR assignments in the Action Plan limits the possibility of a comprehensive overview of JASPERS overall support in one country.

In terms of duration, the *portfolio* review indicates that on average IQR services are delivered within 145 days. Only 12 assignments (out of 54) prior to Omnibus were delivered by JASPERS within a timeline that was longer (183 days) than the time limit that was established in the Omnibus. Across the countries that benefited from JASPERS services, it is notable that IQR assignments in Germany and the Czech Republic had a significantly longer duration than the average of 146 days. The assignments in Lithuania on the other hand, had a delivery time of 44 days (see also 6.2.2).

Among the 10 *sampled IQR assignments*, 9 were carried out on projects on which technical advisory support services had also been delivered. The evidence collected confirms that in all these cases there were working contacts between JASPERS advisory and JASPERS IQR. These contacts were observed being instrumental in efficiently clarifying potential issues. At the same time, a significant potential trade-off between efficiency and independence (which should be at the core of JASPERS IQR's activities) emerges; while JASPERS IQR's coordination with JASPERS advisory may increase efficiency, such dialogue with JASPERS advisory may reduce JASPERS IQR's autonomy. In this respect, analysing the delivery of IQR services suggests the need for re-examining the rules on the relationship between JASPERS advisory and JASPERS IQR.

Based on *document review*, PSA procedure and contents are clearly set out in the working arrangements between DG REGIO and JASPERS that was approved in December 2017 and which confirmed what was already then common practice. While in principle in the JADE database, a PSA assignment should remain open for the delivery of all the rounds of PSA report after the first one, we found evidence that assignments were closed on JADE before the 2nd, 3rd rounds of PSAs<sup>158</sup>. This raises questions about whether it is possible to track, monitor and evaluate JASPERS' activities in cases where more than one PSA round is performed.

Considering the total duration of PSA services from request for PSA to approval, the average duration of a PSA is 32 days, according to the *portfolio* review.

In the previous period (2007-2013), project appraisals (so-called 'quick appraisals'<sup>159</sup>) were conducted by private consultancies under framework contracts and based on specific competences

<sup>158</sup> See Second Interim Report, Chapter 4.3.

<sup>159</sup> Before formal adoption of major projects, the Commission may request a standard quick appraisal of such applications in order to verify how well the projects have been prepared and to ensure their feasibility and

and through standard checklists and forms. Noting that the scope of the quick appraisals and of the PSAs are not fully comparable, the time frame under which quick appraisals was done was shorter: 15 days for the first appraisal compared to 30 days for the first PSA. While this can be indicative of a more efficient review in terms of calendar days, and possibly also in terms of costs, it implies costs to the Commission in terms of tendering and contract management. Furthermore, having several contractors delivering the service implies a risk that services delivered are less uniform across reviews and that gains from economies of scale are not harvested.

However, the duration of PSA services does not necessarily offer a good indicator of efficiency. In fact, the point is not whether a PSA service overall lasts a long time, but rather whether the questions raised in the interaction with the managing authorities and the beneficiaries lead to actual improvement in the project itself or in the project documentation and whether the Commission was provided with sufficient information about the project and its risks to make an informed decision about financing the project. When PSAs highlight critical issues, a long time frame and several rounds of revisions may be needed to beneficiaries to solve one issue. When critical issues relate to project documentation, longer approval times do not lead to actual changes in the project quality.

The analysis of *sampled assignments* reveals that several rounds of PSA happen frequently. Significantly, out of the 13 PSA assignments included in the sample, it was only in 46% of cases that just 1 PSA report was produced. In more than half of the cases, multiple PSA rounds were required.

Table 6-6 Number of PSA reports produced in the 13 sampled PSA assignments (main)

Number of PSA reports	Number of PSA assignments	Share
1	6	46%
2	2	15%
3	3	23%
4	2	15%

Source: Assignment documentation; January 2014–December 2018

### Administrative burden (EQ 13)

Based on a limited number of stakeholder assessments, there is some indication that the administrative burden associated with IQR services is perceived as low. Based on the interviews conducted for the analysis of *sampled IQR assignments*, 2 beneficiaries and 7 managing authorities perceived the involved administrative burden as low and no beneficiary nor managing authority reported a high burden. A positive assessment was also given regarding JASPERS' response time. No interviewee viewed it as high, 3 beneficiaries and 4 managing authorities viewed it as reasonable and 2 managing authorities viewed it as short.

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financial and economic viability. This task will be carried out through desk-based analysis of the project application dossiers. The consultant will assess the content of the application form in line with the above-mentioned regulatory requirements for major projects in the respective programming periods, the Guidance on the Methodology for carrying out Cost-Benefit Analysis (including relevant CBA guide), the Commission Guidelines on State Aid and the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Birds, Habitats and Water Framework Directives. The consultant should also be aware of wider environmental policy and new legislation which might be relevant in specific cases (e.g. climate change, noise etc.). Source: Tender specifications to call for tenders 'Multiple framework contract' 2013CE16BAT064, Ref. Ares (2014)1531385 - 14/5/2014.

In addition, the analysis of the sampled assignments suggested that the close dialogue between the managing authority and JASPERS IQR, which is a pillar of Article 102.1 projects, contributes to an efficient process.

Further, according to different views expressed during the *seminar*, project application submissions through the IQR procedure were generally assessed positively by Member States, as they are characterised by smooth communication and an easy process of submission of documentation.

As far as PSA services are concerned, an important merit in terms of efficiency services derives from the reduced workload and administrative burden on the side of the European Commission. Out of 11 assignments covered by interviews with Commission representatives (from a total sample of 13 PSA assignments), in 8 cases the interview suggested that JASPERS PSA service loosens the administrative burden on European Commission staff. It is also noted that the possibility of relying on JASPERS prevents burdensome tendering processes and thus leads to a more efficient use of time for Commission staff, by exempting them from managing tenders and contracts.

When a JASPERS technical advisory support service is followed by a PSA assignment, the advice provided by JASPERS advisory and JASPERS IQR (i.e. the division performing PSAs) are generally aligned. However, according to the perceptions of the beneficiaries and managing authorities interviewed, an administrative burden may arise in the event of lack of alignment. Among the beneficiaries and managing authorities who expressed a view on the administrative burden, 3 beneficiaries and 2 managing authorities defined the latter as low, while two beneficiaries and two managing authorities defined it as high. In these last cases, the two JASPERS divisions disagreed on the interpretation of an issue, and as a result the approval process became cumbersome. In the perception of these managing authorities and beneficiaries, this is a considerable shortcoming: having received a technical advisory support service, they would expect a quick process, but are confronted with a lack of clarity and a perceived duplication of efforts instead.

#### 6.2.4 Coherence of review services

The evaluation assesses the extent to which JASPERS review services deliver results in coherence with the EU policies and guidance (external coherence) (EQ 16, 18) and are coherent with JASPERS advisory services (internal coherence). In particular, the analysis explores whether there were instances of inconsistencies between the findings of the JASPERS review services and the European Commission's assessment.

#### **External coherence of review services with EU guidance (EQ 18)**

The analysis of external coherence of review services builds on the analysis presented under coherence of JASPERS technical advisory services with EU guidance (see section 4.3.4). The analysis focused on identifying inconsistencies between issues raised by JASPERS review services and issues raised by the European Commission in interruption letters. In the majority of projects in the sampled assignments (72%), the interruption and observation letters from the European Commission took over the critical issues highlighted by the JASPERS Service in the PSA reports and requested the beneficiaries and managing authorities to address these and provide clarifications. However, as presented in the table below, 6 (of 21) instances were found in which JASPERS review positively appraised the project (i.e. raised no critical issues) but the European Commission nevertheless interrupted the projects. In 3 of the 6 instances, the PSA report failed to capture all outstanding issues, while in 3 instances the situation was the opposite (with more issues in the PSA than the interruption letter). The examples are further elaborated in the table below.



Table 6-7 Assignments where inconsistency between JASPERS PSA review and European Commission assessment was found (N=21)

Projects positively assessed by review but interrupted by EC		Differences in assessments by JASPERS review and European Commission
Rail, air and maritime	1 (out of 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In one project, three PSA reports and interruption letters were issued. In total, there were two instances of discrepancies between the PSA reports and interruption letters. The first interruption letter mentioned three more critical issues than the PSA report. These were related to the financial analysis (financial analysis on national capital, financial sustainability analysis, and replacement costs). While the second PSA report did not raise issues with the financial analysis, the second interruption letter raised a critical issue related to the financial analysis (plausibility of NPV/C not demonstrated, due to deficiencies in demand analysis).</li> </ul>
Roads	2 (out of 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In one project, no critical issues were mentioned in the PSA report. The interruption letter, however, raised 4 issues with respect to the option analysis and risk assessment.</li> <li>In another project, in addition to the five critical issues stressed in the PSA report, the interruption letter raised two more. While one was out of scope of the PSA, the second concerned lack of physical indicators for monitoring.</li> </ul>
Energy and solid waste	2 (out of 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In one project the first PSA report raised six critical issues, while only five were mentioned in the interruption letter. The first PSA report highlighted two critical issues related to climate change, while the interruption letter only mentioned one. The second issue not mentioned in the interruption letter related to a lack of information on measures implemented or foreseen to ensure the resilience of the project to climate change.</li> <li>In another project the PSA report mentions two critical issues related to the demand analysis and the interruption letter only states one, i.e. the justification of the project in the context of enabling export and improving gas supply to the neighbouring countries is missing.</li> </ul>
Smart development	1 (out of 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PSA report mentioned three critical issues related to the financial analysis, financial plan and costs. In the interruption letter following the first PSA report, the Commission asked national counterparts for clarifications on two of the three critical issues identified by JASPERS, i.e. VAT eligibility and the calculation of the residual value, while no disaggregated information for each of the regions was requested.</li> </ul>

Source: Assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018.

For projects that were notified under Article 102.1 with IQR, a systematic assessment to the extent of the one done for PSA regarding the level of coherence between the European Commission guidance and the conclusions of the IQR review was not possible. This is primarily

due to the fact that no official document on the opinion of the European Commission is prepared (unless the projects are marked as incomplete, in which case issues relate mostly to the consistency of the project documentation rather than substance matters).

Nevertheless, the *sampled assignments* included 10 major projects that benefited from JASPERS IQR services<sup>160</sup> and the documents of these assignments were assessed within the scope of the evaluation.

The assessment of 10 sampled assignments of IQR suggests that in the majority of assignments (8 out of 10) there were no inconsistencies found in the review and recommendations provided in the IQR reports with regard to EU objectives and EU guidance. In some instances, JASPERS provides suggestions on how to improve specific activities so as to be aligned with EU requirements that are not of critical importance (e.g. alignment of pictures with format required in Annex 1 of European Commission Implementing Regulation 1011/2014).

In 2 major projects (2 of 10 sampled assignments), the Commission found the submitted project documentation to be incomplete. In both instances, the incompleteness was related to Part A of the notification form as well as the physical monitoring indicators. These issues are related to the completeness of the project documentation rather than substance matters and thus do not indicate severe coherence issues.

The *interviews* with managing authorities (8 IQR assignments) and beneficiaries (5 IQR assignments) indicated that the review of JASPERS was consistent with the European Commission conclusions. Interviewees from the European Commission (2) stated that they perceived the JASPERS IQR service as being coherent with EU requirements because the major project notification process that uses the IQR function (Article 102.1) was designed by the European Commission, thus leaving little room for inconsistencies.

### **Internal coherence of review services with JASPERS advisory (EQ 17)**

The analysis of coherence of JASPERS review services with advisory services was performed under technical advisory (see section 4.3.4). As mentioned in that section, overall findings from the sampled assignments of major projects, which also were subject to both advisory and review, indicate that instances of inconsistencies or differences in assessment by the two JASPERS functions are limited but can occur.

#### **6.2.5 EU added value of review services**

The evaluation assesses the extent to which JASPERS review services (PSA and IQR) are bringing EU added value compared to actions taken at national, regional and international level (EQ 19) and provides insight into the consequences arising from phasing out the JASPERS review service (EQ 20). EU added value from the JASPERS review service encompasses the extent to which the quality (only IQR) will be available in the absence of JASPERS (technical and methodological added value) and the extent to which a similar review could have been provided by other schemes/mechanisms. The assessment is based on interviews for the assignment forms (managing authorities and beneficiaries (IQR), interviews with the EU Commission (PSA) and the online targeted consultation.

### **Added value of IQR and PSA (EQ 19)**

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<sup>160</sup> All of the 10 projects that benefited from JASPERS IQR have been approved and granted co-financing by the EC.

The managing authorities interviewed (covering 8 out of 10 assignments) confirmed that the added value of IQR service stems from JASPERS' expertise in preparing EU-funded projects and knowledge of EU requirements and technical expertise/capabilities in comparison with alternatives at national or regional level. The assessment of the interviewed beneficiaries and managing authorities indicates that private consultants would possibly be able to provide review services of a similar quality. A market alternative may, however, not be able to provide the same level of standardisation and consistency. The beneficiaries pointed interviewed to the fact that JASPERS can familiarise itself with the project before it is submitted for review, while maintaining its independence. This speeds-up the review process and prevents requests for clarifications during the approval process. Furthermore, the proximity to the European Commission allows JASPERS' IQR Division to request clarifications from the European Commission. Currently, there is no alternative scheme that could in a similar way act as a bridge between national authorities, beneficiaries and the EC.

The added value of the JASPERS PSA stems from JASPERS technical and methodological expertise, and from JASPERS' experience in preparing EU-funded projects. Interviews with European Commission representatives (10 out of 12 interviewees) confirmed that an independent review function could also be provided by external/private consultants as was the case in the 2007-2013 programming period. Compared to these alternatives, an important part of the added value of JASPERS PSA services stems from the close dialogue with the European Commission and the high level of quality standardisation and consistency. For clearly defined content of review, the market alternatives could be more efficient on the basis of a price competition mechanism. As with IQR, compared to alternatives at the national, regional or international level, a key feature of the PSA is the close dialogue that JASPERS IQR can have with the European Commission, as mentioned above, established by the working arrangement document.

### **Consequences of phasing out the JASPERS PSA and IQR (EQ 20 and EQ 21)**

The phasing out of the concept of major projects approval and thus the requirements to use JASPERS review services (PSA and IQR), could potentially have a negative impact on the consistency of appraisal and the compliance with EU objectives (e.g. in state aid) in the projects submitted for financing. Interviews with representatives of the European Commission (7 out of 10) indicated that phasing out PSA would lead to some negative consequences on the quality of projects.

In terms of phasing out JASPERS IQR services, the beneficiaries (covering 7 assignments out of 10) and the managing authorities (covering 5 assignments out of 10) also expected some negative consequences. According to the interviewed beneficiaries the consequences would include potential delays in approval time of applications, lesser quality of documentation and lack of compliance with the EU requirements. Those interviewees that did not foresee issues referred to the proposed new regulation which does not include the concept of major projects. Only one interviewee mentioned the increase in their administrative capacity, as a factor which meant that the need for JASPERS IQR was decreasing.

In terms of willingness to pay for JASPERS IQR services, both beneficiaries and managing authorities had difficulties answering this question with only 10 answers provided. 2 beneficiaries mentioned that under certain conditions, they would be willing to pay, whereas 2 other beneficiaries mentioned that they would not be willing to pay for JASPERS IQR services. Managing authorities covering 4 assignments mentioned that they would be willing to pay under certain conditions, and 1 managing authority covering 1 assignment would not be willing to pay. The remaining interviewees did not provide an assessment.

The results of *online targeted consultations* showed that 60% of the respondents (to the open questions) underlined that phasing out JASPERS would have consequences<sup>161</sup>. However, the majority of the comments<sup>162</sup> provided by respondents are linked to either technical advisory or to JASPERS in general, and not the review functions. 10 out of 114 (9%) comments (on various issues) addressed the possible impact of phasing out JASPERS review in general or specially PSA/IQR, of which 6 specifically point to the fact that phasing out the review services (PSA/IQR) will have a negative effect on the quality of the projects.

### 6.3 Summary of the assessment of review services

The following section presents the summary of findings concerning review services per evaluation criterion and evaluation questions. The evaluation questions are listed in section 2.1 above.

#### Relevance

Review services are found to be relevant in the current programming period in meeting the needs of the European Commission and national authorities for ensuring quality and compliance with EU requirements via a streamlined procedure (EQ 2 and EQ 3). The portfolio, the assignment forms, interviews and country fiches indicate the relevance of the review services for the European Commission in relation to the PSA and for the European Commissions and the managing authorities for the IQR. In the current programming period, more projects were submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA although some countries exclusively used Article 102.1 with IQR for notification of their projects. This trend was partly influenced by the initial uncertainty regarding the Article 102.1 procedure and the fact that Member States could not certify expenditure under this procedure before notification to the European Commission (prior to the Omnibus Regulation which entered in force in August 2018).

#### Effectiveness

The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of review services, that is, whether they influenced the timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects in the 2014–2020 programming period (EQ 6) and whether they addressed critical issues in major projects (EQ 5).

First, the evaluation analysed the effect of IQR services on the timeline of appraisal and approval of major projects in the current programming period (EQ 6). In this respect, the analysis finds that the introduction of the 180-day regulatory timeline for the delivery of the IQR services supported an increased standardisation of the duration of the review process. Specifically, the findings suggest a high variation in duration of delivery of IQR assignments prior to the Omnibus Regulation (standard deviation  $\pm 111$  days) as compared to the duration of the delivery of IQR assignments after the Omnibus Regulation (standard deviation  $\pm 41$  days). Furthermore, the evaluation finds that the introduction of the 180-day regulatory deadline was respected in most assignments (98% of the portfolio) and, where delays occurred, these were no longer than 1-3 days in most cases.

At the same time, when comparing IQR appraisal with the post-appraisal submission timeline (30 days), the evaluation finds that IQR appraisal led to a longer duration of appraisal both for assignments completed before the Omnibus Regulation (by 100 days on average) and for assignments completed after the Omnibus (by 150 days). The evaluation found that the appraisal

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<sup>161</sup> Corresponding questions within the questionnaire: *D7. In what way would you be affected if JASPERS was phased out? For instance, to what extent would a phasing-out of JASPERS affect the timeliness and quality of current and future projects? Can you give concrete examples?*

and approval process of major projects notified under Article 102.1 with IQR is on average slower (by 77 days on average) than the appraisal and approval process of major projects submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA. Explanatory factors are the shorter duration of PSA services and the relatively low average duration of interruptions. The duration of such interruptions is cumulatively lower than the full duration of IQR services.

Second, the evaluation analysed whether IQR assignments effectively identified issues that require clarifications or inconsistencies in the project documentation (EQ 5). In this regard, the evaluation finds that IQR services were effective in highlighting inconsistencies and requiring clarifications on specific issues. Similarly, for PSA assignments, the evaluation finds that PSA reports raised critical issues in 50% of analysed cases. These critical issues were most often in relation to: 1) the option analysis (83% of cases where critical issues were raised); 2) project cost (58% of cases); 3) risk analysis, economic analysis, and demand analysis (50% of cases). The evaluation finds that PSA services act as a filter for identifying critical issues in cases where JASPERS advisory support was not used. PSA reports identified on average more critical issues for non-assisted projects (7.3) as compared to assisted (4.4). When comparing issues identified in PSA reports with those identified in interruption letters from the European Commission, the evaluation concludes that there is no consistent approach in classifying critical, non-critical issues and observations by JASPERS and the European Commission. Specifically, whereas the PSA reports clearly make a differentiation between critical, non-critical and observation issues, the interruption letters do not systematically make that differentiation. Clear findings on whether PSA reports identify all critical issues, when compared to interruption letters, cannot be made. Nevertheless, when comparing all issues identified in the interruption letters with critical issues identified in PSA reports, interruption letters raise on average more issues than the critical issues identified in the PSA reports. These findings cannot be generalised to all PSA services as they rely on in-depth analysis of 17% of the PSA assignments completed by JASPERS in the analysed period.

### Efficiency

Triangulating evidence from different evaluation activities offers a consistent picture of both IQR and PSA services:

Although JASPERS IQR's exchanges with managing authorities and JASPERS technical advisory may enhance efficiency, it also points to a trade-off between efficiency and mutual independence. The roles of JASPERS IQR and JASPERS advisory have been clarified and streamlined in an addendum to the IQR working arrangements pursuant to the Omnibus Regulation. The addendum introduced more precise procedures for IQR delivery (a completeness check email, the indication of a time limit for the duration of the assignment) that can potentially support JASPERS in a more efficient use of resources (Q 12).

Though precise data are not available, the development of precise procedures in the delivery of PSA services have introduced some structure potentially affecting efficiency in a positive way. However, shortcomings in tracking the time spent on PSA rounds, after the first one, raise doubts over the possibility of monitoring the use of resources. In addition, misalignments between JASPERS advisory and JASPERS IQR reported in almost half of the assignments generate a perception of unnecessary administrative burden (EQ 13).

### Coherence

The evaluation assessed external coherence of review services by assessing the extent to which the guidance given by JASPERS is coherent with the European Commission's guidance (EQ 18). Furthermore, the evaluation explored the extent to which JASPERS review services are coherent with JASPERS advisory services (internal coherence). Review services are found to be broadly

coherent with EU guidance (EQ 18), but some inconsistencies are found in respect to PSA. In the majority of cases analysed (72%), the interruption and observation letters from the European Commission took over the critical issues highlighted by the JASPERS IQR Division in the PSA reports and requested the beneficiaries and managing authorities to address these and provide clarifications. In 28% of the sampled assignments (6 of 21), instances were found where projects were assessed positively by review (PSA) but then were interrupted by the European Commission. Findings from the sample assignments of major projects analysed that were subject to both technical advisory and review (PSA and IQR) indicate that instances of inconsistencies in the assessments by the two JASPERS functions are limited but can occur.

### **EU added value**

JASPERS review services are found to have provided important added value in ensuring uniform and consistent appraisal of major projects. The added value of review services (both IQR and PSA) lies with the technical expertise of the IQR Division which enables a consistent and standardised appraisal of major projects (EQ 17). For IQR this also enables a close dialogue of JASPERS with the European Commission services where JASPERS communicated the expected content and quality to national authorities and beneficiaries and European Commission services. The direct beneficiaries, for IQR managing authorities and European Commission for PSA, found that both IQR and PSA have a distinct added value in the form of methodology and the knowledge of EU requirements, which would not be available should the service be phased out as there are no comparable schemes for review. As the PSA services are provided to the European Commission, it could affect the Commission's ability to assess the quality of the project applications. However, due to proposed changes to the major project procedures, the approval of projects will be the responsibility of the Member States. The lack of independent quality review may affect the consistency and quality of project according to a majority of the interviewed managing authorities. However, few managing authorities and beneficiaries were willing to pay for the service (EQ 20 and 21).

## 7 PLANNING, MONITORING AND FINANCING JASPERS SERVICES

This chapter presents the results of the assessment of JASPERS administrative set-up for planning, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services. The section focuses on presenting findings in relation to the effectiveness of the administrative set-up of JASPERS (EQ 4) and efficiency criteria (EQ 12). The chapter outlines the processes for planning, monitoring and financing the JASPERS services (section 7.1), the findings by evaluation criteria (section 7.2) and provides a summary of findings (section 7.3). Data gaps and limitations on the findings are presented in chapter 2.3.

### 7.1 Processes for planning, monitoring and financing JASPERS services

In terms of the **planning of technical advisory, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services**, as explained in section 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 and elaborated in Appendix A on institutional analysis, this is done in line with working arrangements concluded by JASPERS with each beneficiary country. As of end of 2018, and subsequent to the ECA Report, the process of planning of such services is done on the basis of rolling Country Action Plans signed with each beneficiary country and assignment fiches.

The **planning of IQR services**, as elaborated in section 6.1 above, is done via working arrangements between the European Commission and JASPERS and working arrangements between JASPERS and the Member States. As mentioned above, pursuant to the Common Provisions Regulation amendment (Omnibus Regulation, August 2018), JASPERS and the Member States signed amendments to the working arrangements to adjust the rules on certification of expenditure and the process of IQR. According to the working arrangements, the IQR project pipeline is one of the elements for planning and determining IQR staff needs in JASPERS. The **planning of PSA services** is done under the PSA working arrangements between JASPERS and DG REGIO and the Commission requests PSAs on a rolling basis as new major projects are submitted by Member States, as explained in 6.1 above.

The basis for **management and monitoring of JASPERS services** is the Quality Management and Results Measurement Framework (presented in section 3.5 above). The key processes related to the management and monitoring of JASPERS services are detailed in the Quality Manual and services/assignments done by JASPERS are recorded in the JADE database and in assignment documentation (which varies according to the type of assignment and is described in the Quality Manual processes). Furthermore, since February 2017 JASPERS has implemented a system for monitoring time and resource expenditure (through a new timesheet system), while before that date no records on level of effort on individual assignment is available.

The **financing of JASPERS services** is defined in Specific Grant Agreements (SGAs) that are signed by the European Commission services and JASPERS for each mandate (ESIF, CEF, IPA). The SGAs are signed on an annual basis for services under the ESIF mandate and on multi-annual basis for the IPA (and Serbia) and the CEF (I and II) mandates. Budgets for each mandate are established as contractual agreements between the Commission and the EIB. JASPERS creates an Operational Plan based on the results of the RMF, which then guides the assessment of needed resources and is used to draw up the annual budget estimates. The details of this exercise are, however, not known by the evaluators.

## 7.2 **Assessment of the planning, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services**

The following sections present the findings concerning the effectiveness of the set-up for the planning, management and monitoring of JASPERS services (EQ 4) (see section 7.2.1) and whether the current arrangements (including the system of planning and management of assignments) allow for the efficient use of financial and human resources (EQ 12) (see section 7.2.2).

### 7.2.1 *Effectiveness of planning, management and monitoring of JASPERS services*

When it comes to the planning of JASPERS services, the ECA study found shortcomings related to the contents of the rolling Country Action Plans, which led to less accurate planning and less frequent consultations with the European Commission, which the study concluded reduced their strategic value<sup>163</sup>. Against this background, this evaluation analysed the applicable arrangements for the planning of technical advisory, capacity building and horizontal and strategy support services. As mentioned above (see section 7.1), the planning processes for JASPERS services have been subject to several modifications subsequent to the ECA special report. Specifically, JASPERS developed a new process for planning of advisory services which has been included in the Quality Manual (v.1.4) as of June 2018, and according to the Action Plan to address ECA and IAS recommendations is effective as of September 2018. The Country Action Plans are now adjoined by assignment fiches, which are consulted with the relevant European Commission services prior to the inclusion of the assignment in the Country Action Plan<sup>164</sup>.

Although it is still early to assess the effects of this new procedure on the optimisation of the planning process, the data collected for this evaluation points to a few interim findings. First, when it comes to the structure of the Country Action Plans, as pointed out by the ECA special report, the present evaluation finds also that the strategic value of the Country Action Plans used at the beginning of the programming period was reduced. The Country Action Plans in the 2007–2013 programming period were agreed on a yearly basis, and contained several sections including an overview of the objectives of the beneficiary country, sectors, subsectors for JASPERS intervention, status on all interventions and projects for intervention in the upcoming year. Compared to these, the Country Action Plans in the 2014–2020 programming period are mere lists of projects updated on a rolling basis. The analysis of the Country Action Plans from the *country fiches* (Croatia, Italy, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, North Macedonia) does not show major changes to the structure of the Country Action Plans over time. The format continued to be a list of projects updated on a rolling basis. While the strategic value of such rolling lists may be questioned, their practical functionality was flagged in *interviews* with JASPERS as a response to a needed flexibility in planning.

The revision of the Country Action Plans process at the end of 2018 also introduced a systematic use of assignment fiches, which are now required for each assignment before they are included in the Country Action Plans. Furthermore, JASPERS shares the assignment fiches with the relevant European Commission services, which have five working days to respond and provide their reflections on the proposed assignments. This new process of consultation with the Commission services was in response to the concerns raised by the ECA special report concerning the level of involvement of the Commission in the planning of JASPERS advisory services. Prior to the introduction of the new approach, the Quality Manual (v.1.2) indicated that formal requests for JASPERS support were to come from the Member States through a template (i.e. a project fiche)

<sup>163</sup> European Court of Auditors (2018), Special Report JASPERS – time for better targeting, no. 01/2018.

<sup>164</sup> See Action Plan to address ECA and IAS recommendations, January 2019; JASPERS Quality Manual, v.1.3, 29.6.2018, JASPERS Quality Manual, v.1.4, 6.6.2019.

containing a description of the expected assignment. However, this process was less formalised. An analysis of all the *sampled technical advisory assignment and horizontal and strategy support assignments*, indicates that project fiches were not systematically available for all assignments (see Table 7-1 below). Across the sample of analysed assignments only 28% of assignments had project fiches. Where available, project fiches contained information about the assignment's objectives and purpose of JASPERS support, thus enabling prior planning of the support. It should be noted that the sampled assignments did not include any assignments opened after the introduction of the new assignment fiche procedure. Thus, it is not possible to assess whether the new procedure led to an improved process of planning or if this new procedure is adhered to by JASPERS. The Country Action Plans are also assessed in terms of relevance in section 4.3.1.

Table 7-1 Number of assignments with **available project fiches** and percentage relative to total number of assignments per type of service (N=56)

ESIF major projects (N=18)	Technical advisory				Horizontal/strategy support (N= 14)	Total (N=56)
	ESIF non-major projects (N=8)	IPA projects (N= 6)	CEF projects (N=10)			
7 (38%)	3 (37%)	1 (16%)	1 (10%)	4 (14%)	16 (28%)	

Source: Project fiches, % calculated relative to the total number of assignments per type of service

The previous ECA report also raised concerns about the high number of administratively closed assignments in the JASPERS portfolio. The *portfolio analysis* indicates that 9% (94 assignments) of assignments in the period January 2014–December 2018 were administratively closed. As shown in Table 7-2, a downward trend in the number of administratively closed assignments can be noted over the past three years after a peak in the number of administratively closed assignments in 2016 (when the proportion of administratively closed assignments was 33% of assignments in that period). The downward trend in the number of administratively closed assignments over the past three years can be interpreted as an indication of JASPERS' improved planning processes.

Table 7-2 Number of **administratively closed assignments** and percentage of total assignments in the portfolio per year (N=94) (January 2014–December 2018)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total (2014–2020)
13 (14%)	10 (11%)	31 (33%)	27 (29%)	13 (14%)	94 (9%)

Source: JADE, % calculated based on the total number of assignments

In absolute terms, the highest amount of administratively closed technical advisory assignments related to ESIF major projects. Relative to the number of assignments in the portfolio for a specific type of service, the highest proportion of administratively closed assignments related to horizontal and strategy support (19%), and technical advisory IPA projects (19%) (see Table 7-3). The reasons for administrative closure of assignments are not recorded in the JADE database. Thus, a systematic analysis at portfolio level of the reasons for closure were not possible. The data from the analysis of assignment documentation (action completion notes) for the *sample of assignments* (14 administratively closed) indicates that the reasons for administrative closure vary. Across the analysed assignments, they included the fact that activities foreseen in the assignments were transferred to other assignments (5 assignments), lack of follow up from the

beneficiaries (6 assignments), rescoping of projects which led to a change in the choice of financing source, e.g. from ESIF to CEF-Energy (2 assignments) (see details in Second Interim Report, section 4.2.1.1). While this data cannot be generalised to all 94 assignments, it provides an indication for the rationale behind administrative closures. Some of these identified reasons (e.g. lack of follow-up from beneficiaries, transfer of contents of assignments from one to another) indicate a need for better planning and targeting of support.

Table 7-3 Number and percentage of **administratively closed assignments** per type of service (N=94) (January 2014–December 2018)

Technical advisory				Capacity building	Horizontal/strategy	Review		Total
ESIF major	ESIF non-major	CEF projects	IPA projects			PSA	IQR	
31 (7%)	10 (7%)	2 (5%)	9 (12%)	3 (5%)	36 (19%)	-	3 (6%)	94 (9%)

Source: JADE extracted as of 2019, % calculated based on the total number of assignments for each specific type of service

Delivery of advisory services is done in line with the internal JASPERS quality procedures as set out in the Quality Manual, but there is limited follow-up related to the actual implementation of the advice provided. The analysis of the *sampled assignment* indicates that JASPERS advice is not recorded systematically in action completion notes and guidance notes. The quality manuals (v.1.1, v1.3, v1.4) require that advice provided by JASPERS should be recorded in guidance notes (in cases of 'comprehensive advice') or informally (email exchanges or calls). Although it is not clear from the quality manuals what is the minimum advice for a guidance note recording the advice provided (i.e. there is no definition of what 'comprehensive advice' entails), it is noted that 64% of the 37 analysed advisory assignments had a guidance note issued. For the remaining cases (36%), advisory support was provided through less formal methods (e.g. in meetings, calls or emails). In cases where JASPERS provided advice between interruptions and re-submissions of projects (4 cases in the sample), there was no additional new assignment opened in the JADE database and there was no new action completion note issued to capture the support provided (see Table 7-4). The lack of a systematic and consistent approach to recording JASPERS advice limits the ability of JASPERS to monitor whether the advice provided is taken on board by the beneficiaries. Furthermore, similar to the ECA special report, the evaluation found no requirements for Member States to demonstrate that the advice provided by JASPERS was utilised in improving the projects.

Table 7-4 Availability of guidance notes (N=37), availability of second (N=4) and third action completion notes (N=3) in technical advisory assignments for ESIF major projects

Guidance notes (N=37*)		Second ACN (N=4)		Third ACN (N=3)	
Available	Not available	Available	Not available	Available	Not available
64% (27)	36% (15)	0% (4)	100% (4)	0% (3)	100% (3)

Source: Assignment documentation, January 2014–December 2018

Note: \*42 technical advisory assignments in total but 5 assignments were administratively closed

Data from the JASPERS internal monitoring system indicates that JASPERS is performing well when it comes to the quality of JASPERS advice and expertise but there is room for improvement (as compared to internal JASPERS targets) when it comes to level of satisfaction with inputs and deliverables and timeliness of advice. The data from the JASPERS KPI system indicates that the level of satisfaction of stakeholders with the quality of JASPERS advice and expertise was high over the past 2 years (above 60% of beneficiaries were very satisfied with the quality of JASPERS advice and expertise). In contrast, the level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the timeliness and inputs and deliverables of JASPERS has fluctuated over the past 3 years. A decrease can be observed in 2019 as compared to 2018 for both indicators<sup>165</sup>. For the timeliness indicator, in the past 2 years, JASPERS has not met its target in terms of timeliness of JASPERS input and there has been a decrease of 20% in the number of beneficiaries that state that they are very satisfied with the timeliness of JASPERS inputs as compared to previous years. In contrast, the results of the *online consultation* point to a higher level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the quality of JASPERS advice (90% of respondents were satisfied to a very large or a large extent)<sup>166</sup>, timeliness of JASPERS inputs (84% of respondents were satisfied to a very large or a large extent)<sup>167</sup>, and quality of inputs and deliverables (84% of respondents were satisfied to a very large or a large extent)<sup>168</sup>. The discrepancy between the results from the KPI monitoring system and the results of the online consultation can be explained by the fact that the online consultation does not capture a dynamic trend (but an overall picture) and it also only contains a sample of beneficiaries instead of all.

To sum up, as of June 2018, the processes for planning have been changed to encompass a more systematic approach towards the development of assignment fiches and more involvement of the European Commission in the strategic decisions for planning of assignments. However, the introduction of the new processes has entered into force only recently and the full effect of the changes are yet to be observed. The evaluation finds that prior to June 2018 there was a need for improvements in terms of the process of planning of JASPERS services with a focus on a more strategic selection of advisory assignments and a need to reduce the number of administratively closed assignments in the portfolio. Furthermore, the evaluation finds some shortcomings in terms of the transparency of the advisory process from the side of JASPERS (i.e. recording the advice in written in guidance notes) as well as on the transparency of the process on the side to the national authorities (i.e. how the advice is considered and the effect it has). Lastly, although the level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the services of JASPERS is relatively high, some areas of improvement related to the timeliness of inputs and deliverables are found.

### 7.2.2 Efficiency of planning, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services

This section presents the key findings in relation to the efficiency of the planning and management of JASPERS resources (financial, human and time resources) (EQ 12).

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<sup>165</sup> JASPERS KPI monitoring system.

<sup>166</sup> Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: Quality of JASPERS advice and expertise. A total of 210 responses, of which 56% to a large extent, 34% to a large extent, 6% limited extent, 3% no opinion.

<sup>167</sup> Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: Timeliness of JASPERS inputs and deliverables (e.g. completion notes, guidance notes, guides). A total of 210 responses, of which 37% very large extent, 42% large extent, 10% limited extent, 4% very limited extent, 10% no opinion.

<sup>168</sup> Question asked: D3. Based on your experience, to what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects: Quality of JASPERS inputs and deliverables (e.g. Completion notes, guidance notes, guides). A total of 210 responses, of which 41% very large extent, 43% large extent, 6% limited extent, 9% no opinion.

Under the Special Grant Agreement (SGA) mechanism for financing, payments by the Commission are made on cost reimbursement based on JASPERS FTE<sup>169</sup>. No indications about expected deliverables or outputs are included in the SGA, beyond the overall objective of the technical assistance to beneficiary countries. SGAs for all mandates define in broad terms the scope of JASPERS activities but do not set any target in terms of achievement of results. As a matter of fact, the commitment of JASPERS is solely on the supply of specialised expertise in the fields of advisory for project preparation, horizontal issues, project implementation, networking and training, and Independent Quality Review<sup>170</sup>.

So far, every year actual expenditures are lower with respect to the total committed amount for the ESIF mandate and, considering the multi-annual budgets, for the other mandates as well (i.e. the actual cost was lower than the estimated total cost set out in the SGA). The table below shows the ex-ante/ex-post deviation of the committed budget (the annual comparison is, however, not possible for the CEF mandate since only the overall budget of the SGA for CEF is not divided by year). In the absence of a system to link expected input to expected output and results, it is not possible to assess whether such deviations are due to efficiency reasons (the same expected results achieved at a lower cost) or to a revised scope of activities (lower results as compared to expectations).

Table 7-1 Comparison budget-actual of SGAs by mandates

Mandate	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ESIF – Budget	36,328,820	37,289,680	40,000,000	45,000,000	45,000,000
ESIF – Actual	26,515,899	32,440,557	35,986,987	36,627,616	41,031,101
Difference (%)	-27%	-13%	-10%	-19%	-9%
IPA II – Budget <sup>1</sup>	-	N/A	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
IPA II – Actual	-	1,990,629	634,410	1,259,741	1,064,670
Difference (%)	-	N/A	-37%	26%	6%
Serbia – Budget <sup>2</sup>	-	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
Serbia – Actual	-	51,810	330,773	271,562	474,656
Difference (%)	-	-83%	10%	-9%	58%
CEF – Budget <sup>3</sup>	-	-	-	-	1,402,411
CEF – Actual <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	1,402,411
Difference (%)	-	-	-	-	-

Source: SGAs, JASPERS Annual Reports (2014–2018), JASPERS Audited Accounts, Final Report of J-CEF Support (January 2014–July 2018)

Note: <sup>(1)</sup> Total budget 2016-2020: EUR 5 million. <sup>(2)</sup> Total budget 2015-2019: EUR 1.5 million. <sup>(3)</sup> Total budget, cumulative for the entire period of the CEF 1 mandate, as mentioned in Art. 3 of the Specific Grant Agreement - JASPERS for CEF No 2015/2 (90% EU contribution – EUR 1,262,170; 10% EIB contribution –

<sup>169</sup> In addition, the Commission pays travel and consultancy costs.

<sup>170</sup> Source: Specific Grant Agreements from 2014 to 2018.

EUR 140,241); the overall budget of the SGA for CEF 1 is not divided by year. <sup>(4)</sup> Total actual expenditure cumulative for the entire period of the CEF 1 mandate, as mentioned in the Final Report of J-CEF Support, section 1.4; the total expenditure presented in the Final Report of J-CEF Support is not differentiated per year, but aggregated for the duration of the mandate. N.B. in addition, under the CEF 2 mandate, the cumulative expenditures actually incurred in 2018, as reported in the Annual Report 2018 for the J-CEF 2 Support, amount to EUR 205,722, total cost (90% EU contribution – EUR 185,150; 10% EIB contribution – EUR 20,572). The overall budget of the SGA for CEF 2 is not divided by year. For consistency purposes, the amount of expenditure incurred in 2018 under CEF 2 mandate is not included in the above table but mentioned separately since the corresponding information in terms of planned budget, is not available in the SGA for CEF 2.

As indicated by JASPERS, a yearly budget exercise is carried out each year on the basis of FTE taking into consideration ongoing assignments, among others. When an assignment is created, the indication of the average duration expected for the completion of an assignment of the same type is available from past records and is mentioned in the communication email to the EC services. The inputs and expertise required for each individual assignment is not accurately known ex-ante other than the average available in monitoring indicators reported to the Steering Committee. The actual need for resources only becomes apparent once the team is working on the project and key issues are identified, e.g. complex environmental issues at a site that emerge during consultations. The tools for ex-ante planning of JASPERS services (project/assignment fiches) do not give an indication of the expected financial costs or actual effort from JASPERS staff associated with the delivery of individual assignments<sup>171</sup>, but only an indication of the expected duration of the service. No systematic indication of expected output or deliverable is made in the project/assignment fiche. Typically, foreseeable outputs of individual assignments include the ACN, planned papers (e.g. guidance for project preparation, etc.) and, if appropriate, workshops. Other outputs (most GNs, notes, explanatory emails, panel discussions, round tables, on-the-job training) are identified in the course of the assignment on the basis of the negotiation with the beneficiary and in agreement with the Commission services. As for ex-post assessment of committed resources, there is no financial reporting on individual assignments. Therefore, information on the cost per assignment (including staff costs, external consultancy and travel costs) is not available. The lack of both ex-ante assessment and ex-post reporting on cost per assignment suggests that JASPERS may not have the appropriate tools to monitor its efficiency in the service delivery.

The management of human resources and time at the level of individual assignments follows a similar logic. Since February 2017 JASPERS has implemented a system for monitoring time and resource expenditure (through a new timesheet system), while before that date no records on level of effort on individual assignments was available. Evidence of actual time allocation for *sampled assignments* created after February 2017 is presented in the Second Intermediate Report (section 4.3.1.1) on the basis of data provided by JASPERS. The fact that only limited ex-ante detailed planning of activities at the level of specific assignments is done allows for flexibility in the delivery of services and for adaptability to evolving needs (traits largely appreciated by beneficiaries, especially when the required activities cannot be well specified ex-ante). However, this also has implications on the level of targeting, both in terms of inputs per assignment (no forecasts on man-days required for each assignment) and outputs (limited clear indications on expected deliverables).

As described in section 3.5, the Quality Management system of JASPERS collects achievement indicators at the level of overarching strategic objectives. The efficient use of financial and human resources is part of such strategic objectives.

<sup>171</sup> The amount required for external consultants, if applicable, is included in the assignment fiche.

In this system, one way of tracking whether experts are working efficiently on assignments is to look at ‘weighted completions per expert’ (part of the Results Measurement Framework), i.e. an indication of the average number of completed assignments per expert weighted by the complexity of the assignments<sup>172</sup>. The calculations are weighted by type of assignments<sup>173</sup> against the average of 282 hours it takes JASPERS to complete an assignment (average of all service types) and are based on timesheet data collected since February 2017<sup>174</sup>. The KPI system, at least until April 2019, has set a target of a completion rate at the level of 3<sup>175</sup> and currently the performance is below target (while in the past it was well above it)<sup>176</sup>.

Figure 7-1 JASPERS assignment completion rate per expert



Source: JASPERS presentation, September 2019.

The trend of completions broadly reflects the programming cycle, with peaks in the middle and at the end of the programming periods, when the reprogramming and the end of the period approaches and managing authorities tend to push for project submissions. The number of

<sup>172</sup> Evaluators have had no access to raw data behind the weighted completions figures calculated by JASPERS.

<sup>173</sup> Data per service type and further details on the weighting process are not available. The calculations cover all mandates.

<sup>174</sup> According to JASPERS’ September 2019 presentation to the Steering Committee Meeting, the average required time for technical advisory support of major projects is 457 hours, 245 hours for technical advisory support for non-major project, 230 for horizontal assignments, 164 for IQRs, 83 for PSAs, 131 for administratively closed assignments (no information on capacity building). These calculations are based on all assignments started after 1.2.2017 (when the tracking of time per assignment began) and that were completed by June 2019. As such, the average of 282 hours per assignment is affected by the exclusion of long-lasting assignments started before February 2017.

<sup>175</sup> As reported in JASPERS indicator update January–April 2019. JASPERS’ September 2019 presentation to the Steering Committee does not mention targets in relation to this indicator. As such, the validity of the target is unclear and likely subject to methodological finetuning by JASPERS.

<sup>176</sup> The target does not diversify among assignment types (for instance, a PSA assignment counts as much as an advisory assignment on a major project). Having diversified targets by type of assignments would be meaningful to accommodate the different nature of activities and avoid a perverse incentive to focus on assignments which are relatively easier to complete.

assignments is instead lower at the beginning of the programming period (2014–2016) when the project pipeline is still building up.

This indicator may reflect not only the efficiency of JASPERS experts but also more contextual aspects related to the programming cycles. The interpretation of the long-term trend of a diminishing rate of completions per expert<sup>177</sup> is not unequivocal. It may reflect a difference between the two programming periods (different procedures followed for the phasing of projects, the delay in the implementation of programmes experienced in the 2014–2020 period<sup>178</sup>), or assignments are becoming more complex over the years, thus requiring more time to be completed, or the productivity of experts is decreasing.

Beyond the completion rate per expert, a more thorough understanding of the procedures guiding the use of human resources per assignment could add value. According to evidence collected from JASPERS, once an assignment is opened by JASPERS advisory, it remains ongoing until an action completion note is prepared or if a decision to administratively close the assignment is made (in exceptional cases). Given the lack of a precise ex-ante definition of expected deliverables and man-days, there is no precise indication on how to decide on the completion (except for PSA services) or closure of assignments. The completion/closure of the assignment is the result of a combination of factors (related to the advice provided for the specific areas of intervention, the follow-up actions of JASPERS counterparts, considerations of progress vs. time etc), and the decision is largely made in consensus with the JASPERS counterpart.

Since 2017–2018, improvements have been made to the system of planning and time allocations, as JASPERS is required to fill in assignment fiches before the implementation of assignments which should include preliminary estimations of the expected total duration of the assignment (not the actual working time to spend in terms of man-days) and of the main deliverables to be produced. The European Commission can refuse assignments that are not considered a priority and where JASPERS is not seen as best suited to perform the activities. Furthermore, JASPERS has implemented the abovementioned timesheet system as of February 2017 collecting information on different activities. Before the launch of this system, this type of monitoring was conducted only at mandate level (no data are available on this reporting).

The internal key performance indicators system provides some indication of the resource allocations to specific categories of activities. Notably, as presented in the graph below, in 2016, only 62% of the time was spent on assignment-specific activities. Since then, a clear trend can be recognised, consisting in an increase of assignment-specific time allocation, at the expense of the categories Preparatory Work and Other. However, as the target for this indicator (i.e. 'Maintain the focus of JASPERS experts on assignments whilst allowing for the allocation of the necessary time to the other activities') is not clear-cut, it is unclear whether the trend was brought about as a result of a willingness to increase assignment-specific time allocation or due to other reasons (e.g. increased ability and speed in preparing assignments before their opening). Further, how the three categories vary depending on the seniority of JASPERS experts, cannot be ascertained through this KPI<sup>179</sup>, nor through others, while it would constitute a relevant aspect for assessing the efficiency of planning and management of human resources.

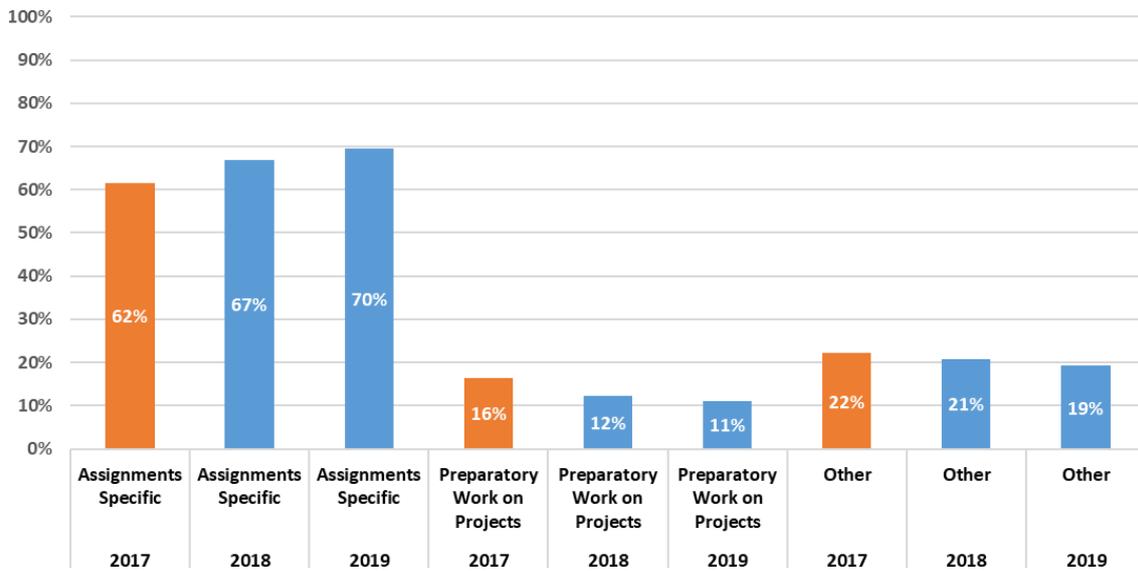
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<sup>177</sup> From an average of 3.3 in the years from 2008 to 2013 to 2.1 in the years 2014–2019, the highest value in 2014–2019 (2.63) is lower than the lowest one in 2008–2013 (2.69)

<sup>178</sup> The ECA report noted that the number of major projects expected in the period 2014–2020 was probably overestimated and that delays in the implementation of the programmes caused a postponement of preparation and submission of projects as well as a lower than expected demand for JASPERS support in the first years of the programming period.

<sup>179</sup> Evaluators have not accessed raw data behind the shares of time allocation calculated by JASPERS.

Figure 7-2 JASPERS time allocation per type of activity



Source: JASPERS presentation at the Steering Committee meeting, September 2019

A more result-oriented system to control for the use of resource would indicate when and how to move from the ‘preparatory work’ to the opening of an assignment and from implementation to the closure, avoiding activities that do not contribute significantly to the expected output.

Overall, although the arrangements for planning were improved following ECA recommendations and the Quality system allows for monitoring some KPI on the use of resources, no evidence has been found that considerations related to the efficient use of resources are directly reflected in the planning and selection of assignments.

### 7.3 Summary of the assessment of the planning, management, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services

The following section presents the summary of findings concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services.

#### Effectiveness of planning, management and monitoring JASPERS services

The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of the JASPERS administrative set-up for the delivery of JASPERS services, understood to mean the effectiveness of the planning, management and monitoring of services (EQ 4).

The evaluation finds that efforts to optimise the planning of JASPERS services have been made but it is too early to assess their full effect. First, similar to the ECA special report, the analysis of planning processes for advisory services through the 6 country fiches and a sample of 79 selected assignments (linked and main) indicates that the processes in place prior to June 2018 had some shortcomings in terms of enabling effective planning. Specifically, the Country Action Plans constituted only rolling lists of projects that were updated on an ongoing basis but there was limited strategic planning associated with the inclusion of assignments in the Country Action Plans. Furthermore, project fiches, which were supposed to be a tool for planning individual assignments in terms of objectives, deliverables and resources, were only made available in a limited number of assignments (28% of analysed assignments). Furthermore, although a slight downward trend over the past three years of the programming period can be noted (2017, 2018, 2019), the proportion of administratively closed assignments out of the total portfolio for the period January

2014–December 2018 is 9%. These findings could point to a need for better planning and targeting of support.

At the same time, the evaluation observes that changes to the processes of planning have been made (in particular after June 2018 and the adoption of the third version of the Quality Manual). The changes specifically entail that the Country Action Plans are to be accompanied by assignment fiches, which are required for all assignments, and the assignment fiches are shared with the European Commission who has the power to veto the request for support on strategic considerations. While the new processes address the recommendations from ECA for more involvement of the European Commission services in the planning of advisory support, it is too early to ascertain whether the new processes have led to more effective planning.

The evaluation further finds potential for improvements in relation to the transparency of the current practices related to advice provided. The JASPERS Quality Manual is found to be less precise when it comes to the requirements to record advice in guidance notes. Across the sample of assignments analysed, the evaluation finds that 64% of advisory assignments had guidance notes, whereas the remaining 36% was provided through less formal methods (email exchanges, calls). Furthermore, the evaluation finds that in none of the cases where a second or third round of technical advisory support was provided on the same project (e.g. between interruptions), was a second or third action completion note issued. Finally, the evaluation does not find any requirements for Member States to report on how advice has been taken into consideration. These findings have implications both when it comes to the transparency of the advisory process from the side of JASPERS (i.e. what type of advice is provided and when) as well as on the transparency of the process on the side to the national authorities (i.e. how the advice is considered and the effect it has).

Lastly, data from the JASPERS KPI system indicates that while stakeholders are generally satisfied with the level of quality of JASPERS advice and expertise, issues were flagged in relation to the timeliness of inputs and deliverables.

### **Efficiency of planning, management, monitoring and financing of JASPERS services**

The mechanism for the financing of JASPERS services relies on Specific Grant Agreements (SGA), which are concluded with the European Commission based on an ex-ante estimate of the demand for services under each mandate. Payments are made on cost reimbursement on the basis of FTE at the end of the year rather than achievements (no performance indicators or indication of outputs to be achieved are outlined in the SGAs and associated with the level of financing). Moreover, the planning and management of individual assignments reflects the needs expressed by the beneficiaries of the assistance, in line with its nature as a technical assistance partnership. This means that the inputs and expertise required for each individual assignment cannot be accurately known ex-ante other than on average and only become apparent once the team is working on the project. Expected output and deliverables are also identified during the implementation of the assignment. Recognising that the flexibility of JASPERS in terms of ex-ante definition of use of resources and output produced is an added value as compared to market alternatives, there is thus a need for JASPERS to strengthen its system of internal resources planning and management by ensuring that they are delivered efficiently, and in a result-oriented way.

The financing mechanism of JASPERS based on cost-reimbursement of FTE with no precise indication of target objectives to be delivered is reflected into an input-driven system for planning and managing resources. The evaluation finds that technical expertise is provided upon the request of beneficiaries to respond to their evolving needs without always previously identifying expected deliverables, output and results. Furthermore, the evaluation finds that JASPERS has

only recently developed a system for monitoring the actual time allocation on individual assignment, while there is still no system in place to plan ex-ante the use of resources (time and financial), link them with expected output and results, check the relation between planned and actual use of resources, along with input (time and financial resources) and output (deliverables, activities, number of assignments). While this flexibility is inherent in the nature of a technical assistance partnership and much appreciated by beneficiaries, it may be prone to possible inefficiencies in the use of resources, especially in the case of assignments of long duration such as some technical advisory and horizontal and strategic support services.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS AND OPTIONS FOR POTENTIAL ACTION

The Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) was created in 2005 and launched in 2006 as a partnership between the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to support the achievement of specific EU policy objectives. In the 2014–2020 programming period, JASPERS services have expanded both in terms of mandates covered (with the inclusion of CEF and IPA, alongside the ESIF mandate) and in terms of types of services covered (technical advisory, capacity building, horizontal and strategy support and review services – including independent quality review and post-submission appraisal). The work undertaken by JASPERS in the current programming period is supported by an indicative grant of up to EUR 250 million (as stated in the Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of JASPERS 2014–2020).

This mid-term evaluation analysed the extent to which JASPERS services have contributed to reaching the strategic and operational objectives of the technical assistance partnership, i.e. the extent to which JASPERS services have contributed to the development of good quality and mature infrastructure projects that are swiftly approved and implemented across beneficiary countries and the extent to which they have supported the development of the administrative capacity of beneficiaries and managing authorities to prepare projects. The evaluation assessed the delivery of JASPERS services covering their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and EU added value in line with the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines<sup>180</sup>. The following sections present the key conclusions of the evaluation structured by evaluation criteria and evaluation questions and, where relevant, by services of JASPERS. The sections also provide indications of possible options for future actions for the implementation of the JASPERS partnership in the programming period (2021–2027).

### 8.1 Relevance

The relevance criterion assessed whether JASPERS services can be perceived as adequate tools to improve the quality of preparation of projects (EQ 1) and the extent to which the services respond to the key needs of JASPERS' 'clients' (both the European Commission and national stakeholders) (EQ 2, EQ 3).

JASPERS technical advisory services are found to meet the needs of the beneficiaries (EQ 2) and to be a relevant tool to improve the quality of the preparation of projects (EQ 1). Furthermore, advisory services continue to be needed in the current programming period. The needs assessed at the beginning of the programming period have in general materialised both in terms of priority sectors and countries requesting support (EQ 2, EQ 3). JASPERS technical advisory was mostly requested to provide support with the quality of project documentation rather than to help with improving the project quality and implementation. In some of the reviewed assignments, the applications were already quite mature at the stage when JASPERS intervened, and the support was mostly requested to support the preparation of the documentation in view of the short timeline of the calls.

In line with the ECA recommendations, this evaluation finds that the support provided by advisory would be better targeted with a focus on projects at an early stage of project development, projects which act as pilot projects for similar projects already in the pipeline, and projects in specific sectors/areas where needs are more pressing.

<sup>180</sup> European Commission (2017), Better Regulation Guidelines. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/better-regulation-guidelines.pdf>

The analysis shows that JASPERS capacity building services are largely relevant to meet the needs of the authorities (EQ 2). Beneficiaries of JASPERS capacity building mentioned that improvement could include tailoring of capacity-building services to non-major projects; providing more train-the-trainers courses; organising experience-sharing conferences for national authorities; and focusing the capacity building in specific sectors or areas. Awareness of JASPERS capacity building is not high in all Member States.

Similarly, the findings suggest that horizontal and strategy support services are a relevant tool to meet the needs of the national authorities requesting support for the preparation of strategies and prioritising projects (EQ 1). Improved planning and targeting of horizontal and strategy support assignment may be required as indicated by the high proportion of administratively closed horizontal and strategy support assignments (19%).

The evaluation finds that the two review services fulfil the purpose of providing an independent quality review of ESIF major projects (EQ 1). In the current programming period, more projects were submitted under Article 102.2 with PSA although some countries exclusively used Article 102.1 with IQR for notification of their projects. This trend was probably influenced by the initial uncertainty regarding the Article 102.1 procedure and the fact that Member States could not certify expenditure under this procedure before notification to the European Commission (prior to the Omnibus Regulation which entered in force in August 2018).

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the evaluation identifies the following possible options for consideration in terms of future action:

- Consider if the overall planning of JASPERS could be supported by country-level strategies (e.g. updated every 2 years) developed together with the countries and the European Commission. The country strategy could identify areas of priority where particular added value can be expected. The strategy could supplement the Action Plans at a more strategic level and identify sectors and areas where horizontal support and capacity building may be particularly needed.
- Consider encouraging JASPERS to develop more targeted capacity-building activities for the staff of project beneficiaries in relation to the priority areas identified in the needs assessment. This would strengthen administrative capacity and enhance the understanding of EU requirements with project beneficiaries (especially in newer fields such as of climate change).

## **8.2 Effectiveness**

The effectiveness criterion assessed several dimensions including: the effectiveness of the organisational and administrative set-up (EQ 4) and, the results and effects, related to both JASPERS' objective of ensuring the development of good-quality and mature projects that are swiftly approved (EQ 5, EQ 6, EQ 7, EQ 8, EQ 9) and the objective of supporting the administrative capacity of managing authorities and beneficiaries (EQ 10, EQ 11) (see intervention logic in section 3.4).

The evaluation first assessed the extent to which the administrative set-up, so the *processes for planning, management and monitoring of JASPERS services*, are effective (EQ 4) (see section 7.2.1 above presenting the findings). First, in terms of planning, the evaluation found that steps have been taken by JASPERS to address shortcomings identified in the previous ECA report. The Country Action Plan processes have been further improved to ensure a more systematic use of assignment fiches, which are shared with the European Commission services. Although the practical effects of these new processes have yet to materialise (as the process has only been in

place since late 2018), the new process addresses the issue of the need for greater involvement on the part of the Commission. The planning processes in force up to mid-2018 had some limitations. Specifically, the evaluation finds that the main planning tools (rolling Country Action Plans) rely on ad-hoc inclusion of assignments and limited strategic planning, and the project fiches that were in place prior to June 2018 were not systematically developed (only 28% of analysed assignments had project fiches). The ECA report further interpreted the high proportion of administratively closed assignments as an indication of a lack of strategic planning. The current evaluation finds that 9% of all assignments in the portfolio for 2014–2018 were administratively closed but a slight downward trend can be observed in the past three years. The relatively high proportion of administratively closed assignments in the portfolio is also interpreted in the context of this evaluation as an indication of JASPERS' flexible approach to planning, which allows for the ad-hoc inclusion/removal of new assignments depending on needs.

Second, in terms of management and monitoring of JASPERS services, the evaluation finds that the current practices have a few limitations, which have implications both when it comes to the transparency of the advisory process on the part of JASPERS (i.e. what type of advice is provided and when) and on the part of the national authorities (i.e. how the advice is considered and the effect it has). Specifically, the evaluation finds that JASPERS makes good use of processes for recording advice to beneficiaries, but these could be further formalised. Specifically, the evaluation finds in 36% of the assignments analysed that advice was not recorded in written form and was only provided through less formal methods (email exchanges, calls, meetings). The evaluation also finds that while stakeholders are generally satisfied with the level of quality of JASPERS advice and expertise, issues were flagged in relation to the timeliness of inputs and deliverables.

The evaluation finds a mixed picture when it comes to the *effectiveness of JASPERS advisory and review services in highlighting (critical) issues* (EQ 5). In terms of technical advisory services to ESIF major projects, the evaluation finds that at an overall level and when comparing assisted projects with non-assisted projects, JASPERS-assisted projects tend to have fewer interruptions and fewer critical issues than non-assisted projects. This is interpreted to be an indication of a positive effect of advisory services on the quality of projects. At the same time, a closer analysis of a sample of assignments highlighted instances where issues with projects assisted by JASPERS advisory were not addressed during the preparatory phase but were raised subsequently in the appraisal and EU decision-making process. However, the effectiveness of the JASPERS advisory support hinges upon the extent to which beneficiaries onboard the advice and address the issues prior to submitting the projects. In terms of review services, the evaluation finds that post-submission appraisal services act as a filter in identifying critical issues, although the evaluation did identify case where interruption letters raised more issues as compared to the critical issues in PSA reports. However, this finding underlines a limitation not of the quality of the review services but rather related to the absence of a standard approach in identifying issues with projects in the PSA reports as compared to the interruption letters, which imposes difficulties in tracing issues across phases of appraisal and approval major projects.

The evaluation further assessed the extent to which JASPERS technical advisory and review services contributed to the swift approval of projects and whether they had an *effect on the timeline of preparation, approval and implementation of projects* (EQ 6). In this respect, the evaluation finds a mixed picture.

For ESIF major projects, the evaluation does not point to a clear conclusion concerning the effect of JASPERS advisory on the preparation and implementation of projects, and evidence collected depicts a divergent picture with data suggesting that JASPERS services can both speed up and

delay the process of project preparation and implementation. The evaluation finds evidence to suggest that JASPERS has a positive effect on the timeline of approval of projects. Specifically, JASPERS-assisted ESIF major projects are found to have a faster appraisal and approval timeline compared to non-assisted major projects (faster by 85 days for those undergoing independent quality review and by 15 days for those undergoing post-submission appraisal, on average). Similarly, interruptions for ESIF major projects assisted by JASPERS are on average shorter (by 34 days) as compared to non-assisted projects. The evaluation interprets these findings as an indication of a positive effect of JASPERS advisory on the timeline of approval of ESIF major projects. The evaluation finds that independent quality review services and post-submission appraisals were delivered within the foreseen deadlines (as applicable – 30 days for PSA and 180 days for IQR for assignments after the Omnibus Regulation). The introduction of the 180-day regulatory timeline for the delivery of IQR services after the Omnibus Regulation is found to have supported an increased standardisation of the duration of review services but also led to an increased duration of such services. Comparing the appraisal and approval process of major projects undergoing independent quality review (pre-submission appraisal) as compared to those undergoing post-submission appraisal revealed that projects submitted with pre-submission appraisal tend to have a longer timeline (by 77 days on average). This is explained by the shorter duration of post-submission appraisal services and the relatively low average duration of interruptions.

For *ESIF non-major, CEF and IPA projects*, due to limitations concerning the availability of data on timeline at the level of the portfolio, no overall conclusion can be drawn. Circumstantial evidence from the in-depth analysis of the sample of assignments and interviews for such projects depicts a divergent picture concerning the scale and direction of the effect.

The evaluation also assessed the *effect of technical advisory services on the quality and standard of project documentation* (EQ 7) and the *quality of projects* (EQ 9). The evaluation finds that JASPERS support has been comprehensive, most often covering concrete advice on e.g. option analysis (72% of projects) and demand analysis (67% of projects). In such projects, JASPERS was involved at an early stage in the project preparation and could provide comprehensive advice on improvements to be made. However, the evaluation also finds that JASPERS' advice was in some cases limited to review of the project documentation. Given the high level of technical and methodological expertise of JASPERS experts, such assignments where advisory support only reviews the project documentation may add less value as compared to assignments where advisory support is provided in the development of the project.

The evaluation finds a mixed picture when it comes to the effect of JASPERS on the quality of projects. Evidence suggests that JASPERS had an important effect on improving compliance with EU rules in a large proportion of the projects analysed (86% of cases analysed). However, the findings concerning the effect of JASPERS on the design, scope and outputs of projects is less conclusive.

Circumstantial evidence from the analysis of the sample of projects and online targeted consultation suggests that in some cases JASPERS contributed to improvements to projects in terms of their design and cost savings, but this finding cannot be generalised to the full portfolio of assignments.

Finally, the evaluation also assessed the concern raised by the ECA special report concerning a potential conflict between the objectives of JASPERS by way of a trade-off between 'timeliness' and 'quality' of projects (EQ 8). The evaluation findings do not point to a clear conclusion. However, circumstantial evidence from specific cases points to a potential trade-off between

quality over timeliness generated by the decision of Member States to submit applications more quickly and obtain certification of expenditure.

The evaluation also assessed the extent to which JASPERS services contributed to the objective of ensuring the development of administrative capacity of managing authorities and beneficiaries by assessing the extent to which capacity-building services strengthened the administrative capacity of beneficiaries (EQ 11) and the extent to which horizontal and strategy support services contributed to setting policy objectives (EQ 10) (see section 5.2.2 for the elaborated findings).

While measuring the full effects of such services mid-way through the programming period has inherent limitations, the evaluation focused on assessing the preliminary results and outputs of such activities. For capacity building, the evaluation finds that such activities had a wide outreach (ranging between 20 and 300 participants) including a 'multiplier effect' by using the train-the-trainer concept and have contributed to the dissemination of knowledge on a variety of topics (climate change, environmental aspects, CBA, state aid) through both in-country and multi-country activities. However, the evaluation found some areas of improvements in particular in relation to further tailoring of such activities to smaller countries with a high proportion of non-major projects. For horizontal and strategy support, the evaluation finds that 83% of the cases analysed achieved their initially stated objectives when it comes to outputs and results. This included helping Member States fulfil ex-ante conditionalities, supporting beneficiary countries in the development of strategies and master plans (e.g. transport and water) and targeted methodologies (e.g. transport models).

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the evaluation identifies the following possible options for consideration in terms of future action:

- *Consider whether advisory services can be targeted to ensure the early involvement of JASPERS advisory in the project preparation with a focus on aspects of technical design and economic feasibility of the projects.*
- *Consider whether the monitoring of JASPERS advisory support could be further formalised, both internally by using a more systematic approach to written records on advice provided (e.g. guidance notes), and externally by using a more systematic approach for following up with the managing authorities and beneficiaries on the implementation of advice and the implications the advice had on specific projects (in terms of effects and costs).*
- *Consider whether the capacity-building support can be further targeted to non-major projects and smaller beneficiary countries.*

### **8.3 Efficiency**

The efficiency criterion analysed the relationship between the time, human and financial resources used by JASPERS actions and the changes (both positive and negative) generated by the actions themselves. The evaluation looked at both the efficiency of the overall arrangements of JASPERS and the cooperation among all the parties involved (EQ 12), as well as those related to individual assignments (EQ 13). Evidence on efficiency is mixed and influenced by a systematic lack of data.

The evaluation found that the overall arrangements of JASPERS for planning and use of resources reflect the need to flexibly respond to the evolving needs of the beneficiaries, in line with the nature of technical assistance of JASPERS and under the constraint of available resources, more than ensuring a balance between the resources employed and output produced (EQ 12). This logic is also underpinned by the financing mechanisms specified in Specific Grant Agreements

concluded with the European Commission, according to which payments are made on cost reimbursement of FTE without consideration of actual achievements. The internal system of Quality Management and Results Measurement Framework implemented by JASPERS identifies a high-level strategy map outlining a number of objectives and related achievement indicators. The relevant KPI for efficiency is the completion rate per expert<sup>181</sup>, which has been below the target value of 3 ever since 2013.

The assessment of efficiency at the level of individual assignment is hampered by a lack of data (EQ 13). Except for review services, which must be delivered according to a precise time frame, JASPERS assignments can last for a long time. The average duration (from opening of the assignment to closure in the JADE database) of technical advisory is almost 2 years, the horizontal and strategy support services being the longest. The intensity of JASPERS support fluctuates over the assignment's duration depending on the nature and scope of work requiring JASPERS input only at specific steps over a long-term activity. Systematic tracking of time spent on individual assignments has only been implemented by JASPERS since February 2017, so it was not possible to know for all the assignments the actual level of effort spent from opening of the assignment to closure in the JADE database. It was also not possible to know the financial costs associated with each individual assignment (staff, travel and consultancy costs) since they are tracked only at mandate level. Since inputs and expertise required for each individual assignment cannot be accurately known ex-ante, they become apparent once the team is working on the project and reflecting the needs expressed by beneficiaries, leaving a considerable flexibility.

The evaluation found that, based on perceptions of beneficiaries, the administrative burden in dealing with JASPERS is widely perceived as low and the relation with JASPERS experts is generally managed in a smooth and flexible way, especially thanks to the use of informal exchanges (frequent phone calls, videoconferences and email exchanges). Beneficiaries in Member States largely recognise that the time spent in the interaction with JASPERS is a 'learning by doing' investment (EQ 12).

Among the expected benefit of JASPERS are cost savings generated at project level by the technical advisory activity. Triangulation of data from different sources suggests that, against a general feeling among stakeholders that JASPERS frequently generates cost savings at project level, and this is also reported in the feedback forms collected by JASPERS and used in their KPI system, the actual occurrence of this benefit is not supported by solid evidence. When individual assignments are analysed in depth and sources and nature of cost savings are scrutinised, there is limited evidence on the generation of savings at project level (EQ 13). This is probably due to the fact that the complexity of the concept of cost savings, combined with an ever-evolving methodology for their identification, leads to varying interpretations of savings in the documentation and among stakeholders. Stakeholders may be led to identify a cost-saving effect generated by JASPERS because of the support provided to Member States without fees. The avoidance of cumbersome procurement procedures to access JASPERS services, as compared to possible market alternatives, is however rightly perceived as a cost saving.

Although the introduction of new assignment fiches and a timesheet system (following the ECA/IAS Action Plan) represents positive improvements that enhance the planning and monitoring of the use of resources, more precise indications are necessary before the start of each assignment (in particular on the work schedule and man-days, the expected financial costs and the expected deliverables) against which to check ex-post performance.

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<sup>181</sup> An indication of the average number of completed assignment per expert weighted by the complexity of the assignments. Evaluators have had no access to raw data behind the figures calculated by JASPERS.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the evaluation identifies the following options for consideration in terms of future action:

- *There may be scope for reviewing the system for internal resource planning and management by implementing a more systematic ex-ante and ex-post monitoring of costs associated with the delivery of services against outputs. The introduction of a results-based financing system linking the payments for JASPERS services to the achievement of observable and documented results, as also highlighted by the ECA report, for example by drawing from the Key Performance Indicator system developed by JASPERS.*
- *Consider if specific information on time/costs should be included in the project/assignment fiche and tracked systematically at individual assignment level*
- *Consider including in the Key Performance Indicators system a way to record information on the performance of JASPERS services on efficiency other than the completion rate per expert.*

#### **8.4 Coherence**

The coherence criterion focused on investigating whether JASPERS services were coherent externally and internally. External coherence firstly looked at the extent to which JASPERS services are coherent with EU policies, specifically by assessing whether JASPERS delivers results in coherence with the objectives of policies other than cohesion, transport and enlargement, for example with the EU approach to climate change, environment and state aid (EQ 16). The other aspect of external coherence is assessing the extent to which the guidance given by JASPERS is coherent with the European Commission's guidance (EQ 18). Furthermore, the evaluation explores the extent to which JASPERS interventions are coherent with other advisory services available to beneficiaries at European or national level (EQ 17). An additional aspect examined was internal coherence, i.e., an assessment of the level to which the different JASPERS services were coherent. This is achieved by assessing the extent to which there were instances of overlaps, duplication or inconsistencies in the work of JASPERS on a sample of selected assignments. Furthermore, the internal coherence of JASPERS services was explored.

The evaluation found that advice provided by JASPERS services is generally aligned with the EU approach to the application of requirements and legislation, other services and internally. JASPERS services were found to be overall coherent with EU policies other than cohesion, transport and enlargement, such as the EU approach to climate change, environment and state aid. An analysis of projects benefiting from both technical advisory and review services indicated that, to a large extent, the advice provided by JASPERS is coherent with EU guidance.

Even though JASPERS strives to ensure coherence with EU objectives, in the case of an IPA assignment, the advice provided concerning state aid rules was not fully relevant to the client as the rules are not applicable for pre-accession countries. Other than this exceptional example, the evaluation did not observe differences with regards to the coherence of JASPERS services provided under the different mandates.

While alternative schemes were identified and some assignments benefited from services other than those of JASPERS, there was no duplication or overlaps between those and the work done by JASPERS. When it comes to coherence with other services such as private consultancies, the European Investment Bank or other, the findings did not suggest any significant overlaps between the activities of the different initiatives, it rather created synergies where possible.

Internal coherence between JASPERS services<sup>5</sup> was generally identified, however the dual role of JASPERS (as both reviewer and advisor) is also perceived by the beneficiaries to lead to challenges in cases where the advice coming from one JASPERS function is different than that coming from another. Even though internal coherence between JASPERS services was accomplished to a large extent, instances of inconsistencies or differences in assessment by the two JASPERS functions, while limited, can occur.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the evaluation identifies the following possible options for consideration in terms of future action:

- *Consider communicating more clearly the dual role and separation between the two types of services to national level beneficiaries.*

### **8.5 EU added value**

The evaluation assessed the extent that JASPERS technical advisory services brings EU added value to investment projects compared to actions taken at national, regional and international level (EQ 19) and provides insight into the consequences arising from phasing out or reducing the budget for JASPERS advisory services (EQ 20 and EQ 21).

All the JASPERS services are perceived to provide added value either to the beneficiaries and managing authorities and/or to the European Commission. According to stakeholders, technical advisory services bring added value on methodological, technical and experience across countries. The capacity building activities are perceived by beneficiaries to provide extensive knowledge of EU legislative requirements and facilitate experience and learning across countries. The EU added value of horizontal and strategy support lies in the assistance given in the upstream phase of strategy development, scoping and prioritisation. Furthermore, JASPERS' ability to prepare useful tools that facilitate the tasks of national counterparts and become part of their toolkit emerged as a significant advantage. The flexibility of the services and transfer of knowledge and skills through the hands-on approach to the provision of advice is regarded as an added value by beneficiaries (EQ 19).

JASPERS review services (IQR and PSA) are found to have provided added value in ensuring the high-quality, uniform and consistent appraisal of major projects. The technical expertise of the IQR Division for both IQR and PSA enables consistent and standardised appraisal of major projects, (EQ 19).

There are few alternative schemes to JASPERS on the market for technical advisory services, but these are found to complement rather than overlap with JASPERS services by providing service at different stages (EQ 19). Compared to alternative schemes, the capacity-building activities are perceived as homogenous and consistent across Member States. Standard technical training (e.g. on state aid) could, however, be delivered by specialised service providers. For horizontal and strategic service, comparable services are available and/or used in some Member States. However, market alternatives are not perceived as having the same flexibility (EQ 20).

Managing authorities and beneficiaries see phasing out or reducing JASPERS services as a risk to the quality of projects. Concerns were expressed in particular in relation to technical advisory, capacity building and horizontal and strategic support. But stakeholders were also concerned that the review services would cease (knowing that this will no longer be a requirement). However, the managing authorities and beneficiaries interviewed are unsure whether they would be willing to pay for JASPERS services (EQ 21).

Based on the findings above, the evaluation identifies the following options for consideration in terms of future action:

- *Consider using private consultancies for elements of capacity building where there is no added value using JASPERS services (e.g. standard training in state aid, CBA). These services could be managed by JASPERS in order to ensure coordination between private consultants and JASPERS capacity building.*

## APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### A.1.1 Context and governance of the JASPERS initiative

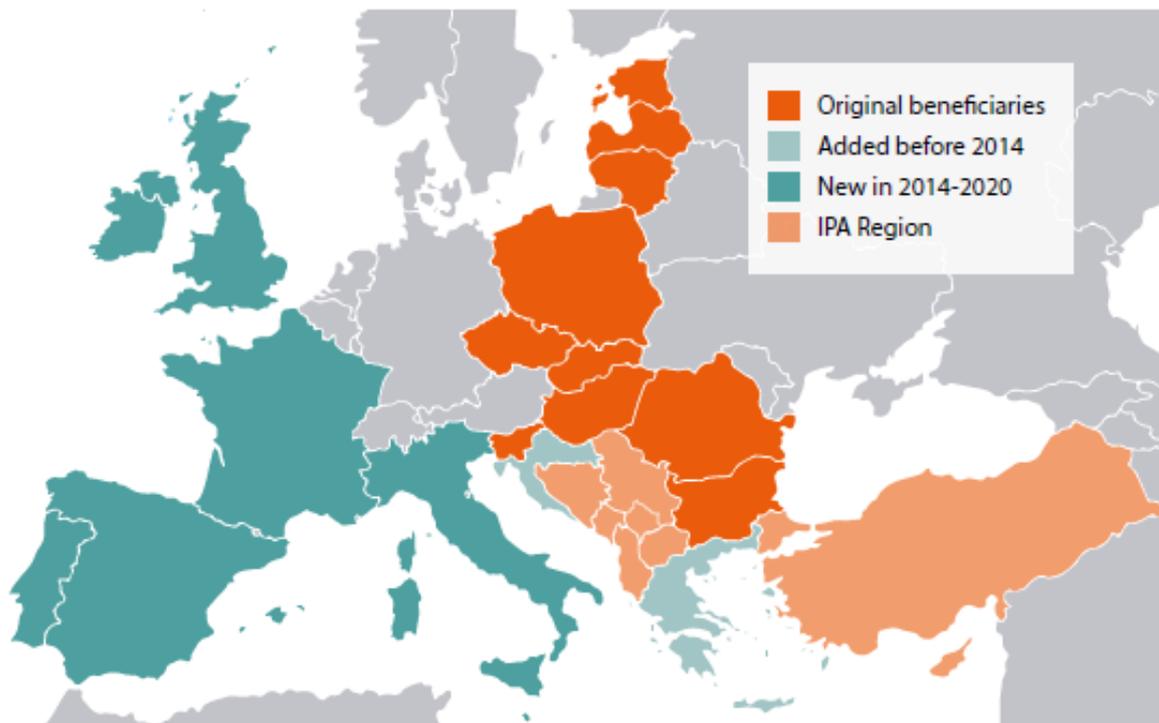
#### Context of JASPERS

The *Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS)* initiative was created in 2005 and launched in 2006 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and later the KfW. Currently, the initiative is implemented by the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The aim of the JASPERS is to provide technical advisory support to the Member States in managing the EU funds and in the preparation and implementation of high-quality projects co-financed by the European Commission. Since its creation, JASPERS evolved considerably, expanding its geographical scope, mandate and the scope of activities undertaken.

In the programming period 2007-2013, JASPERS support was available only for the Member States that joined in 2004 or afterwards which were expected to be less experienced with project development. In the current programming period 2014-2020 (and hence the scope of this mid-term evaluation), JASPERS support was expanded to all Member States and candidate countries. The figure below illustrates the geographical development of JASPERS.

Figure A-8-1 JASPERS beneficiary countries as of 31 December 2017



Source: JASPERS Annual Report 2017

Beyond expanding in geographical terms, JASPERS also expanded in terms of mandates and services provided. In the current programming period, JASPERS can provide assistance for projects under direct management by the European Commission through Connecting Europe

Facility<sup>182</sup> and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance<sup>183</sup> programmes. Furthermore, in the current programming period JASPERS has been tasked with providing review services to the European Commission for major project applications under ESIF.

### Governance of JASPERS

The overall foundation for the governance and administrative set-up of JASPERS is defined in the documents establishing the working arrangements between JASPERS and the European Commission, in particular the [Framework Partnership Agreement](#) for the management of the JASPERS Technical Assistance Facility 2014-2020 (FPA 2014-2020)<sup>184</sup> and the [Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement](#) between the European Union and the European Investment Bank (FAFA)<sup>185</sup>. The two documents outline the overall roles and responsibilities of JASPERS as well as the roles and responsibilities of other parties involved in the management and implementation of JASPERS (e.g. the Steering Committee composed of the European Commission and the European Investment Bank). Further to the FPA 2014-2020 and FAFA, the different European Commission Services have concluded Specific Grant Agreements with JASPERS under the three different mandates (ESIF, CEF, and IPA). The specific grant agreements reiterate the role and responsibilities of JASPERS and further elaborate on the types of services that JASPERS can provide under the different mandates.

JASPERS operational processes are outlined in the [JASPERS Quality Manual](#) which was initially developed in July 2017 and replaced the JASPERS Procedures Manual from November 2010 and ad-hoc related communications to staff that took place in the subsequent period. The Quality Manual was revised three times since its initial development: in November 2017 to review and integrate comments from JASPERS management, in May 2018 to include completeness check to IQR and update the signature rules and review of JASPERS mandates description and the latest in June 2018 to update the JASPERS strategy map. The developments in terms of the JASPERS Quality Manual have been also a response to the Action Plan developed as a result of the ECA and IAS recommendations<sup>186</sup>.

### Organisational structure

JASPERS's organisational structure is defined in the JASPERS Quality Manual. The organisational structure in place during the evaluation period was approved by the Steering Committee in November 2014. Overall, JASPERS is overseen by the Steering Committee that consists of representatives from the EIB and the European Commission. The work of JASPERS is supervised by the Director of JASPERS who has overall responsibility for JASPERS results and reports to the Steering Committee. JASPERS is organised around eight divisions, some that are sector-specific and others which have a more horizontal purpose: Roads Division, Rail, Air and Maritime Division, Water and Wastewater Division, Smart Development Division, Energy and Solid Waste Division,

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<sup>182</sup> Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is an EU funding instrument to realize European transport infrastructure policy. It is under the management of INEA / DG MOVE.

<sup>183</sup> The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is the means by which the EU supports reforms in the 'enlargement countries' with financial and technical help.

<sup>184</sup> Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020, Brussels 20.11.2014, Luxembourg, 4.11.2014. Amendment No 1 to the Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014–2020, 10.9.2015.

<sup>185</sup> Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Union and the European Investment Bank, Brussels, 7.5.2014, Luxembourg 8.5.2014. Amendment No 2 to the Framework Partnership Agreement for the management of the JASPERS technical assistance facility 2014-2020, 10.9.2015.

<sup>185</sup> Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Union and the European Investment Bank, Brussels, 7.5.2014, Luxembourg 8.5.2014

<sup>186</sup> The Action Plan to address the ECA and IAS comments was adopted in December 2017. An update on the progress on the Action Plan was provided by JASPERS to DG REGIO in January 2019.

Networking and Competence Centre, Independent Quality Review Division. Further to the different divisions, JASPERS also has a Quality Management Unit.

The five sector-specific divisions are located in Luxembourg together with the Networking and Competence Centre and the Quality Management Unit. Given the need for proximity and close interaction with the European Commission, as well as the need to maintain an independent stance, the Independent Quality Review Division is located in Brussels. In addition to the different divisions, JASPERS also has a number of regional offices in Bucharest, Vienna, Warsaw and Sofia. The regional offices support specific countries, but the teams cooperate on different assignments across the offices. The graph below shows the organisational structure of JASPERS as of 31 December 2018.

### A.1.2 JASPERS mandates

As highlighted above, as compared to the previous programming period, JASPERS's mandates have increased substantively. In the 2007-2013 period, JASPRS mandate only covered structural and cohesion funds whereas in the current period it expanded to two additional mandates. In the programming period under evaluation, JASPERS provides services across three main mandates, namely: [Structural funds and cohesion mandate](#) (from DG REGIO), [Connecting Europe Facility](#) (from DG MOVE), [Instrument for Pre-accession assistance](#) (DG NEAR).

#### ESIF mandate

Under the [ESIF mandate](#), JASPERS provides technical assistance support to major projects and Non-major Projects that are to be co-financed under the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). For the ESIF mandate (from DG REGIO), the Specific Grant Agreements between JASPERS and DG REGIO outline the framework conditions (budget, scope of the services) for JASPERS. JASPERS signs yearly Specific Grant Agreements with DG REGIO which outline the key functions of JASPERS and the proportion of yearly financing for JASPERS activities. The key services provided by JASPERS under this mandate are presented below.

**Advisory function (Project development):** Under this function, JASPERS provides advice to Major and Non-major Projects in close cooperation with the European Commission to ensure the production of mature project proposals that meet the EU requirements. JASPERS advice focusses on major projects as defined in Article 100 of the Common Provisions Regulation but non-major projects in small EU countries are also to be assisted. Non-major projects may be assisted in beneficiary Member States if they are pilot projects of relevance to EU policy objectives or if they are projects that can be replicated on a wider scale.

The specific services provided by the advisory function are presented in section 0. Projects in need of assistance are identified under the Advisory function are identified and included in Country Action Plans which can be modified upon request from the national authorities (with consultation of the European Commission). Project support provided under the Country Action Plans can include: advice on strategy, conceptual development and structuring of projects, advice on specific aspects of project preparation, review of documentation such as Feasibility study, Environmental Impact Assessment, advice on compliance with EU law, assistance in the review, preparation and completion of applications for funding, advice on implementation issues such as project management or procurement.

**Post-submission appraisals and independent quality reviews:** JASPERS reviews major projects in line with the requirements of Article 102.1 and Article 102.2 of the Common Provisions Regulation when Member States submit projects directly to the European Commission. major projects can be submitted to the European Commission via two channels: either directly to

the European Commission (under Article 102.2) in which case they undergo a post-submission appraisal process performed by JASPERS or to the JASPERS IQR division (under Article 102.1) in which case they are reviewed by JASPERS and then notified to the European Commission.

The approval of major projects is done in line with the requirements foreseen in Article 100 of the Common Provisions Regulation. major projects (defined as per Article 100 of the CPR) are appraised and adopted in line with the quality review criteria included in the Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014. major projects are approved by the European Commission if the quality review criteria are complied with. The quality review criteria include inter alia technical legal and financial soundness of the project, eligibility of the project, reliability of demand analysis, adequacy of the technology proposed, correctness of the calculation of costs, economic and financial viability of the project, compliance with environmental requirements. The full list of quality criteria that the projects are appraised against is presented in Appendix A.

*Text box A-8-1 Process for submission and appraisal of a major project*

As per Article 100 of the CPR, Before the project is approved the Managing Authority checks if the following information is available: details concerning the body to be responsible for implementation of the major project and its capacity, description of the investment and location, total cost and total eligible cost, feasibility studies including option analysis and results, cost-benefit analysis including economic and financial analysis and risk assessment, analysis of environmental impacts and climate change adaptation and mitigation needs, consistency of the major project with the priority axes of the operational programmes, financing plan, timetable for implementation.

As per Article 102.1 of the CPR, the decision on the major project is taken by the European Commission after the project was positively appraised by the Independent Quality Review function of JASPERS. The project is notified to the European Commission together with the project application and the Independent Quality Review Report providing a clear statement of the feasibility and the economic viability of the project. On the basis of the information submitted, the European Commission tacitly approves or refuses the financial contribution within 3 months of the date of the notification.

As per Article 102.2 of the CPR, the decision on the major project is taken by the European Commission on the basis of the full package of documentation in line with Article 100 of the CPR.

Source: Regulation EU No 1303/2013

**Advice on horizontal issues:** whereby JASPERS provides advice on horizontal issues relevant to more than one project or to more than one country

**Project implementation:** whereby JASPERS supports projects in the implementation phase (e.g. procurement strategy).

**Networking and training:** through which JASPERS promotes networking relations and capacity building activities by means of trainings and seminars.

### **CEF mandate**

Under the **CEF mandate** JASPERS can help Member States to develop projects intended for financing under the transport element of CEF. JASPERS advisory services assist projects in preparing mature project applications that meet the requirements of the CEF competitive calls and to identify potential projects for assistance.

For the CEF mandate, JASPERS and DG MOVE concluded two Specific Grant Agreements, one for CEF and another for CEF-2. The SGAs outline the budget and scope of the work of JASPERS under the CEF mandate. The JASPERS services include advisory support for project preparation (similar to the services under the ESIF mandate), project implementation, advice on horizontal issues and networking and training. The selection of CEF projects by DG MOVE and INEA is done in line with the CEF Regulation 1316/2013.

### **IPA mandate**

Under the [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance \(IPA II\) mandate](#), assistance is provided to IPA beneficiary countries in the development of sector strategies and project pipelines for IPA II financing and the development of projects identified by the beneficiaries' National Investment Committees, as well as regional transport and energy priority projects identified in the Western Balkans 6 Connectivity Agenda.

For the IPA mandate, JASPERS and DG NEAR concluded two Specific Grant Agreements, one for IPA II and one for Serbia. The agreement concluded with IPA II envisages that JASPERS will provide project preparation support, advice on horizontal issues, support in project implementation and networking and training. Project support is to be embedded in Country Action Plans. Modifications to the Country Action Plans are to be done in cooperation with the European Commission and the EU Delegations. The Serbia SGA outlines in a similar manner the assistance that JASPERS would provide which was to concern project preparation and advice on horizontal issues.

Major projects in IPA countries are identified as part of the sector operational programmes for transport and environment. The selection of major projects is based on a Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA). The major projects to be funded and implemented with IPA II assistance should be compliant with the priorities determined in the national strategic documents and the national Public Investment Programme. JASPERS provides guidance and advice during project preparation, to help improve the quality of the major projects to be submitted for grant financing under IPA Assistance and is an important quality management tool for infrastructure projects.

#### *A.1.3 JASPERS services*

The main types of services provided to Member States and the European Commission by JASPERS as per the Quality Manual include: [technical Advisory support to major and non-major projects](#), [horizontal and strategy support](#), [capacity building services](#) and [review services](#). The Review services are only provided under the ESIF mandate.

#### **Technical Advisory support to major and non-major projects**

[Technical Advisory services](#) have the overall objectives of assisting beneficiaries and managing authorities in ensuring a swift preparation and approval of major projects while at the same time ensuring a high level of quality of the project documentation and improving the quality of the major projects by helping beneficiaries in planning, reshaping and optimising major projects. Technical Advisory Support can cover all phases of the project cycle including planning, preparation and to the lesser extent implementation. Technical advisory services are the main type of service provided by JASPERS to beneficiary countries for the development of major and non-major projects supported under the ESIF, CEF and IPA mandates. Most of the assignments in the JASPERS portfolio for January 2014 - December 2018 were related to technical advisory services (678, 62% assignments completed, ongoing and administratively closed).

The majority of the Technical Advisory support provided relates to ESIF major projects, but advisory support was also provided to ESIF non-major projects and to CEF and IPA projects (see

Appendix A for detailed statistics). Technical Advisory services cover all aspects of the project cycle: concept development, pre-feasibility stage, feasibility study stage, application stage and implementation stage. In certain cases, Technical Advisory support can also be provided to beneficiaries at implementation stage which includes support in terms of procurement, contract management or project management of works for infrastructure projects. Technical Advisory services encompass a wide variety of activities and can include for example support in project preparation (e.g. engineering and technical advice or methodological advice on specific aspects such as CBA) or support in review and improvement in the standard of project applications and supporting documentation.

The processes related to the provision of Technical Advisory support are outlined in the JASPERS Quality Manual and working arrangements for Advisory services are concluded with the beneficiary countries outlining the type of services to be provided. The Technical Advisory services are planned with the Managing Authorities of the beneficiary countries and presented in rolling Country Action Plans. The Country Action Plans are 'live' documents which can be changed and updated upon agreement between JASPERS and the national authorities. The key steps related to the provision of Technical Advisory services are outlined below.

*Text box A-8-2 Key processes related to Technical Advisory services for Major and Non-major Projects*

- JASPERS and the Managing Authorities agree on a list of assignments to be included in the **Country Action Plans** and agree on **assignment fiches** stating the overall objectives of the JASPERS intervention. The European Commission agrees on the content of the Action Plans and can comment on individual assignments and veto them, if necessary.
- Upon completion of the Technical Advisory support, JASPERS issues an **action completion note** containing an overview of the key areas where support has been provided and recommendations which is shared with the counterpart. Furthermore, JASPERS fills in a **Value-Added Form** and the beneficiaries fill in a **feedback form** where an assessment of the services provided by JASPERS is made. Once the action completion note is sent to the counterpart, the assignment is considered as completed. The Commission receives the action completion notes for information.
- If the assignment is administratively closed upon agreement between JASPERS and the national authorities, an **Action Closure Document** is issued where the reasons for closure of the assignment are stated. The Action Closure Document is approved by the Head of Division of JASPERS and then stored in internal databases.

Source: JASPERS Quality Manual

Advisory support for IPA projects is similar to the procedure described above which is applicable to ESIF major projects. For CEF projects, the difference in the procedure is that instead of an action completion note, JASPERS issues a Project Development Report. The appraisal of the projects under CEF and IPA is done by the European Commission. For CEF projects, the EC informs JASPERS about the result of the appraisal. The possible appraisal decisions are: approved, conditionally approved or rejected. When a project is conditionally approved, JASPERS may be asked to support the national project promoter to mitigate the reasons behind the conditional approval. Conditionally approved projects are usually resubmitted in the next call.

### Review of major projects

Review services can be performed by JASPERS for major projects under the ESIF mandate. The review is performed in accordance with the requirements of the Common Provision Regulation<sup>187</sup> and includes (either / or):

<sup>187</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1302/2013

Independent Quality Review (IQR) – such services are provided by JASPERS directly to the Member States under Article 102.1 of CPR.

Post-submission Appraisal (PSA) – such services are provided to the European Commission under Article 102.2 of CPR.

Through the review function, JASPERS appraise major projects (defined in Article 100 of the CPR) in line with the quality review criteria included in the Article 22, Article 23 and Annex II of the Delegated Regulation No 480/2014<sup>188</sup>. The quality review criteria include for example: technical, legal and financial soundness of the project, eligibility of the project, reliability of demand analysis, and adequacy of the technology proposed.

*Textbox A-1 Quality review criteria for major projects*

- Evidence of sufficient technical, legal, financial and administrative capacity to manage the project in implementation and operational phases
- Evidence of the eligibility of funding of the project on the basis of related requirements linked to location or project area
- Correctness of the calculation of total costs and total eligible costs in line with the requirements set out in Article 61 of Regulation No 1303/2013
- Evidence of eligibility for support from European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund
- Evidence that the public support to the project does not constitute state aid or in case of state aid, that it has been properly taken into account in the calculation of the total public contribution
- Reliability of demand analysis (or business plan) based on realistic estimates
- Adequacy of the technology proposed for the project and the capacity of the final beneficiary to ensure its sustainability, or, in case of insufficient capacity of the final beneficiary, sufficient provisions envisaged to bring this capacity to the level needed.
- Soundness of the conclusion that the project is feasible and can be implemented in the period planned
- Cost-benefit analysis correctly follows the required methodology defined in Regulation No 1303/2013
- Soundness of the conclusion that the project is economically and financially viable and has positive socio-economic effects justifying the level of support to the extent envisaged
- Demonstrated contribution to the objectives of environmental and climate change policies, in particular targets set by Europe 2020 strategy and evidence of account being taken of the risks related to climate change adaptation and mitigation needs, disaster resilience and appropriate measures implemented
- Evidence that the polluter pays principle and the principle of preventive action has been correctly applied.
- Evidence of compliance with the requirements of the environmental legislation in particular Directive 2011/92/EU
- Consistency and adequacy of the project objectives with the specific objectives defined under the relevant priority axes of the operational programmes.
- Adequacy of expected project contribution to result and output indicators of the priority axis
- Adequacy of expected project contribution to socioeconomic development

<sup>188</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 of 3 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

- Evidence that a beneficiary has taken appropriate measures to ensure optimal utilisation of the infrastructure in the operational phase
- Justified total planned financial resources and justified planned support from the Funds correctly presented in the financing plan
- Adequacy of projects' financing plan demonstrating its financial viability for the annual financial needs for implementation of the project.
- Appropriateness and verifiability of the physical and financial indicators for monitoring progress taking into account identified risks
- Soundness and feasibility of the proposed timetable for implementing the major project taking into account identified risks

The main difference between the review performed through PSA and the one performed through IQR is the scope of the quality review criteria covered. More precisely, the IQR Division appraises the projects against all quality review criteria in the Commission Delegated Regulation No 480/2014. In comparison, PSA covers all quality review criteria except for the project admissibility verification (completeness check), the ex-ante conditionality and the policy compliance with the priority axis, the verification of compliance with environmental protection requirements and state aid aspects. These criteria are checked by the European Commission. Furthermore, whereas PSAs differentiate between critical issues, non-critical issues and observations, IQRs do not make that differentiation when asking for clarifications on specific issues.

#### Independent Quality Review

In line with Article 102.1 of the Common Provisions Regulation, Member States can choose to submit their major project applications for an independent quality review by JASPERS and subsequently they can notify the project to the European Commission. Upon request by a national authority and before actual notification of the major project to the European Commission, the IQR Division (which was set up on 1 September 2014) performs an independent quality review of the major project application. The IQR is an appraisal of the major project sent through the notification procedure against the quality criteria set out in the Commission Delegated Regulation EU No 480/2014. JASPERS has concluded working arrangements with the European Commission which outline the IQR production cycle as well as the roles and responsibilities of the European Commission services and of JASPERS. Furthermore, DG REGIO signed on November 2015 two Memoranda of Understanding with DG Environment and DG Climate Action concerning cooperation with DG REGIO in relation to the appraisal of major projects submitted under ESIF funding. The Memoranda outline the roles and involvement of DG Environment and Climate Action in the appraisal process. JASPERS has concluded IQR working arrangements with all the Member States for which review services are provided. So far, JASPERS concluded such working arrangements with Croatia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Romania, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom, Slovakia and Slovenia. The planning and programming of the IQR work is done with the aid of IQR Action Plan which are internal rolling documents that is updated on a regular basis whenever JASPERS IQR is informed of new projects which will be sent for appraisal.

*Text box A-8-3 Key processes related to IQR services and Article 102.1 notification of major projects*

- Member States and JASPERS **IQR working arrangements** contain a two phase-procedure: phase I is when the MA informs the IQR division of its intention to send projects through this procedure, and phase II is when MA formally sends the project documentation to IQR. Once the working arrangements are agreed they are reflected in an exchange of letters between the Member State and the IQR Division.

The IQR assignments are included in future work programme of the IQR Division (**IQR pipeline document**) which is the basis for planning and determining IQR staffing.

- Prior to the IQR services, Managing Authority and the IQR division can have exchanges for the purpose of ensuring that the IQR division is familiarised with the project before it is submitted for review.
- When the project is ready for assessment, the **Managing Authority sends a formal request** to JASPERS IQR and submits the project documentation.
- The IQR division performs a **completeness check** of the documentation received verifying: completeness of the project files in relation to the set of documents indicated in working arrangements signed with Member States, that the project had not been already submitted and that it is included in the OP. The IQR Division then informs the counterpart via email of whether the documentation was complete and an initial expected deadline for the draft IQR Report (which should be within a 6 month period from commencement).
- If the project dossier is complete, the IQR division performs a **first assessment**. Clarifications and comments can be requested from / provided to the counterpart (Managing Authority). JASPERS IQR can also decide whether to consult DG COMP on state aid aspects, DG ENV on environmental aspects and DG CLIMA on climate aspects.
- Once the full quality review of the documentation is performed, JASPERS IQR informs the counterpart and proceeds with the next steps, i.e. drafting the **IQR Report**. If the review confirms compliance with the quality criteria, JASPERS issues a 'positive' IQR and the MS may move ahead with notifying the project to the Commission. If the opposite is found, JASPERS IQR can issue a 'negative' IQR which means that the counterpart needs to further work on the major project to address issues and a second round of IQR is possible if the counterpart decides to continue submitting the project under Article 102.1. JASPERS sends the draft IQR to the MA for information. The MA fact-checks the IQR and sends a confirmation to JASPERS. Thereafter, the **Final IQR Report** is drafted by JASPERS.
- The MA sends the information required by Article 102.1 together with the IQR through the notification procedure to the European Commission. The EC carries out a completeness and quality check of the IQR and application form. If no significant weaknesses of the IQR Report are identified, the project is considered **tacitly approved by the European Commission in 3 months (90 days)** from the date of submission. In duly justified cases the EC can also take an active decision prior to the 90-day deadline.

Source: JASPERS Quality Manual

#### Post-submission appraisal

In line with the Article 102.2 of the Common Provisions Regulation<sup>189</sup>, Member States may choose to submit their major project applications directly to the European Commission. In such cases, the European Commission under the working arrangements for PSA can ask JASPERS for the provision of post-submission appraisal services. The difference as compared to the Article 102.1 procedure (IQR) is the moment of JASPERS intervention as well as the direct requester of JASPERS intervention: under Article 102.2 the Member State submits the application directly to the European Commission who then requests JASPERS review, while under article 102.1 JASPERS prepares IQR Report prior to the notification to the Commission and at the request of the Member State.

The working arrangements between JASPERS and DG REGIO are outlined in a document codifying the arrangements, the current of which entered into force on 15 December 2017. To a certain extent, this document addresses the issues identified by ECA and IAS (i.e. the observed lack of a direct reference to the Article 102.2 and limited clarity of JASPERS role under the PSA procedure).

The appraisal is done against the same legislative requirements as for the IQR procedure, namely the quality review criteria included in the Commission Delegated Regulation No 480/2014.

<sup>189</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1302/2013

Nevertheless, the scope of the post-submission appraisal is different. The appraisal does not cover the project admissibility verification (completeness check), the ex-ante conditionality and the policy compliance with the priority axis, the verification of compliance with environmental protection requirements and state aid aspects, which are checked by the European Commission.

An important part of the PSA review process is to identify and report on critical issues identified in the project documentation<sup>190</sup>. Critical issues are defined under the ESIF mandate as 'an instance of not fulfilling the minimum criteria for quality review of major projects listed in the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014<sup>191</sup> or of non-compliance with relevant EU legal obligations. Critical issues in the appraisal process relate to the level of detail and quality of the project documents submitted and the compliance with the requirements of the legal basis (Art. 100 of the Common Provisions Regulation No 1303/2013<sup>192</sup>) as well as the methodology described in the Guide to Cost-benefit analysis of investment projects Economic appraisal tool for cohesion policy 2014-2020. They can relate to a number of aspects including the strategic alignment with EU priorities and objectives, i.e.: technical feasibility (was an option analysis carried out? was the selected option sufficiently justified?), compliance with environmental requirements and standards (was the EIA carried out?), methodological issues related to financial or economic analysis (are investment costs justified? is the choice of the counterfactual appropriate? Is demand analysis sufficiently detailed?), other types of issues (have the procurement processes and compliance with state aid rules been properly addressed?).<sup>193</sup>

*Text box A-8-4 Key processes related to PSA services and Article 102.2 notification of major projects*

- **Member State decides to submit a project directly to the European Commission** as described in Article 102.2 of the CPR via the SFC2014 platform.
- Once the project is submitted, DG REGIO performs a **completeness check** and if the results of the completeness check are positive, DG REGIO requests a post-submission appraisal of the major project from JASPERS (the IQR Division). The deadline for the delivery of the **post-submission appraisal Report** is set at a maximum of **30 calendar days after submission of the documents to the EC**. Deadlines are subject to negotiation between JASPERS and DG REGIO depending on the workload, and exceptions can be made from the 30-day rule for holiday periods.
- The appointed PSA team (similarly as for the IQR, no member of the team should have been involved at the advisory stage to avoid conflict of interest) appraises the project documentation against the same legislative requirements as for the IQR process except project completeness verification, coherence with the OP, compliance with environmental protection requirements and state aid. These aspects are verified by the European Commission in intra- and inter- service consultations,

<sup>190</sup> JASPERS (2018), Quality Manual

<sup>191</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014 of 3 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

<sup>192</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

<sup>193</sup> Further to critical issues, the process of PSA review can also identify non-critical issues. Non-critical issues are defined as 'an instance where the quality standards for the project, or information requirements, are not fully met but, if these were addressed, would not change the overall positive assessment of the project. Non-critical issues may be project specific or of horizontal nature, i.e. a common issue that may be applicable for multiple projects and promoters, that could be communicated for the Member States or the Project Promoter in order to improve the quality of future applications.

- The PSA Reports are issued with a much shorter deadline than IQR reports and a detailed description of the project is not included. The PSA Report concludes whether the major project fulfils the quality standards and, if applicable, can raise critical issues, non-critical issues and observations to the project documents.
- Once the PSA Report is drafted, it will be peer reviewed by the PSA Task Coordinator and signed by the Head of the IQR Division.
- A **screening meeting** is organised within 5 working days after the PSA submission deadline with participation of the PSA team, Head of IQR, Commission major project team and geographical unit representatives.
- On the basis of the outcome of the PSA report and inter-service consultations, DG REGIO decides whether to approve, reject or interrupt the project.
- If significant deficiencies are identified with the project or project documentation, DG REGIO can issue an interruption letter. The PSA Report is not distributed to the Member State.
- After receipt of an **interruption letter**, the Member State has the possibility to send a revised major project application, having corrected the deficiencies noted in the interruption letter. The Commission can request the updated PSA Report to be produced within 15 days.
- In case of a withdrawn project that i.e. subsequently re-submitted, a new PSA request will be launched following the same procedure.

Source: JASPERS Quality Manual, working arrangements for PSA

### Horizontal and strategic advisory support

Horizontal and strategic advisory support is provided by JASPERS to countries upstream in the preparation of strategies and plans. Horizontal and strategic advisory support is normally non-project specific, but often sector specific and can relate for example to supporting counterparts in building their strategy on specific issues, such as national transport strategies, waste management plans or integrated urban development strategies. The planning processes for strategic and horizontal services are similar to those for technical advisory support.

*Text box A-8-5 Key processes related to Horizontal and strategic advisory support*

- JASPERS receives a request and prepares an Assignment Fiche containing information about the scope of the assignment.
- When the assignment commences, JASPERS and the counterpart have a **kick-off meeting** to discuss project specific and generic aspects of the JASPERS assistance. Prior to the formal kick-off meeting informal meetings can also be held.
- JASPERS provides guidance to the counterpart through **informal advice** (verbally during calls or informal discussions), **emails and guidance notes** (more comprehensive advice or guidance). During the assignment implementation, JASPERS aims at responding at least within two weeks from the request of the counterparts (informal procedure).
- For specific assignments JASPERS can procure consultancy services in the implementation.
- Once the assignment is completed, JASPERS drafts an **action completion note**. A **feedback form** is then filled in by the counterpart and JASPERS fills in a **Value-Added Fiche** where it performs a self-assessment of services.
- If the assignment is closed, the same procedure as for Technical advisory services applied. JASPERS drafts and Action Closure Document which is then signed off by the JASPERS management.

Source: JASPERS Quality Manual

### Capacity building services

Capacity building services can include trainings, workshops, on-line fora and other networking and knowledge sharing activities, dissemination of guides and studies and can be provided to beneficiaries covering all three mandates according to the SGAs for ESIF, CEF, IPA. Capacity

building services can be provided as a separate assignment (e.g. a training on CBA). However, JASPERS transfer of knowledge and on-the-job capacity building also takes place through advisory assignments that JASPERS performs. JASPERS capacity building assignments can cover either one country or be multi-country (covering the needs in several countries). The need for capacity building activities can be identified via multiple channels, including: as a direct request from the countries or as a result of other advisory support where issues are identified in terms of the administrative capacity of beneficiaries. An overview of the processes related to capacity building services are presented below. The planning processes for capacity building services are similar to those for Technical advisory support.

*Text box 8-6 Key processes related to capacity building services*

- If capacity building assignments are provided as self-standing activities (e.g. a seminar or training event), JASPERS will provide the service and upon completion issue an **action completion note**. For individual capacity building activities, JASPERS sends a **feedback form** to the beneficiaries to collect views and opinions about the performance of the services. Further to this, JASPERS completes a **Value-Added Fiche**.
- When capacity building is an objective covered by a larger assignment, the relevant actions need to be described in the relevant ACN sections.
- If the assignment is administratively closed, JASPERS issues an **Action Closure Document**.

Source: JASPERS Quality Manual

The delivery of JASPERS capacity building activities is done by JASPERS through its Networking and Competence Centre. The role of the division is to coordinate the capacity building activities of JASPERS. Furthermore, the Networking and Competence Centre is in charge of the implementation of the JASPERS Network Knowledge and Learning Centre.

JASPERS has established JASPERS Network Platform – Knowledge and Learning Centre (launched in 2012) is envisaged to complement JASPERS advisory and capacity building by fostering the dissemination of good practice and knowledge amongst JASPERS stakeholders. The work of the JASPERS Network Platform is documented in Annual Programmes which outline the activities of the Networking Platform. The annual programmes are rolling documents which can be further completed with actions or events which may be decided upon during the year depending on the demand or needs.

### **Share JASPERS expertise through intervention in other mandates (e.g. EIAH)**

JASPERS can provide support to projects or assignments outside of JASPERS mandate. However, as per the JASPERS Quality Manual, these activities must be done in manner as to not interfere with the execution of JASPERS other mandates. According to the JASPERS Quality Manual, JASPERS can support other mandates if: there is an agreement of collaboration endorsed by JASPERS Steering Committee, where negotiations are ongoing to consider inclusion within JASPERS remit and there is a clear cost recovery agreement.

#### *A.1.4 Quality Management and Results Measurement Framework*

**Quality Management** is a key component of the JASPERS internal management processes. The Quality Management approach (QM) is described in the JASPERS Quality Manual and is applicable to all services and mandates of JASPERS. The Quality Manual and Quality Management approach was defined following the EFQM model<sup>194</sup>.

<sup>194</sup> EFQM is a model for quality management of organizations. See: [www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org)

The **JASPERS Quality Manual** was initially developed in July 2017 and replaced the JASPERS Procedures Manual from November 2010 and ad-hoc related communications to staff that took place in the subsequent period<sup>195</sup>. The Quality Manual was revised four times since its initial development (see table below). The revisions were related to improvements related to certain procedures of JASPERS or to the further definition of the JASPERS Strategy Map.

Table A-8-1 Overview of process related to the development of the JASPERS Quality Manual

Document	Approval date	Details
JASPERS Procedure Manual	01-11-2010	Outlining the processes related to the implementation of JASPERS activities.
JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.0	06-07-2017	Draft integrated Quality Manual
JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.1	28-05-2018	Revised version of the Quality Manual integrating comments received
JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.2	29-06-2018	Revised version of the Quality Manual integrating completeness checks to IQR, update of signature rules and review of JASPERS mandates descriptions
JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.3	29-06-2018	Revised version of the Quality Manual containing an updated Strategy Map
JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.4	06-06-2019	Revised version of the strategy map, link to JASPERS intervention logic, changes to IQR process due to Omnibus Regulation, inclusion of J-CEF2 mandate requirements, update of assignment creation process, link to risk management procedure, updates to feedback process

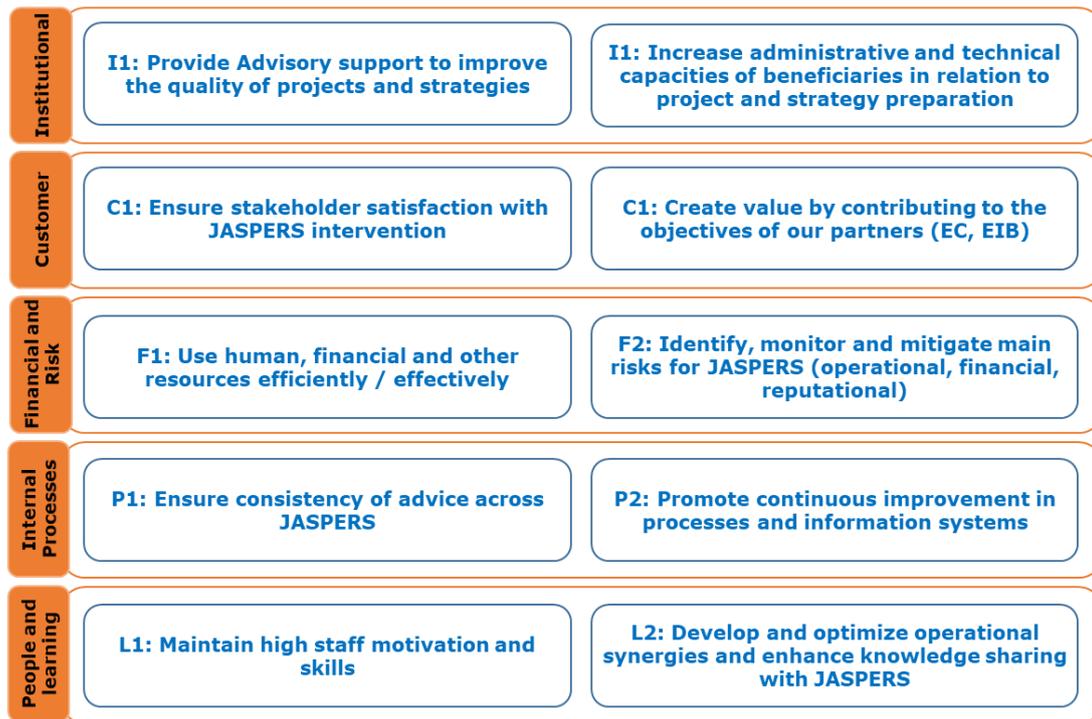
Source: JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.4 (2019)

The JASPERS Quality Manual embeds a **High-level Strategy Map** which defines 10 high level objectives of JASPERS. The High-level Strategy Map of JASPERS was approved by the Steering Committee on the 14 September 2016 and subsequently reviewed in the updated version of the Quality Manual of 2018 and 2019. In line with the recommendations of ECA and the IAS, the High-Level Strategy map outlined the institutional objectives of JASPERS.

The High-level Strategy Map currently in force is outlined below.

<sup>195</sup> It should be noted that the previous versions of the Quality Manual as well as the governing documents that existed prior to that were not shared by JASPERS with the evaluation team despite repeated requests. Thus, the analysis relies only on the last version of the Quality Manual, interviews with JASPERS heads of divisions and the responses of JASPERS to the ECA and IAS recommendations from January 2019.

Figure A-8-2 JASPERS High Level Strategy Map



Source: authors based on JASPERS Quality Manual v 1.4 (2019)

JASPERS' Quality Management Unit has developed in cooperation with the Commission a **Results Measurement Framework (RMF)** to measure the performance of JASPERS towards the achievement of the high-level objectives. The JASPERS RMF embeds key results related to: customer, people, society and business results.

The Results Measurement Framework also outlines key performance indicators and targets for JASPERS in terms of achievement of overarching objectives. A refinement of the JASPERS RMF was triggered by the ECA recommendations to improve processes. This methodological work on the improvement of the quality management system is still ongoing. Most recently, JASPERS presented the results of the RMF in the Steering Committee meeting of 18 September 2019.

The RMF results is also the basis upon which JASPERS creates its Operational Plan which then guides JASPERS in the planning of needed resources and for justifying the annual budget estimates formalised in Annual Specific Grant Agreements (SGAs).

#### A.1.5 Financing of JASPERS services

Different European Commission Services have concluded Specific Grant Agreements (SGAs) with JASPERS under the three different mandates (ESIF, CEF, IPA). SGAs set out yearly or multi-annual commitments for JASPERS based on forecasts provided by the EIB. In some cases, commitments are revised during the course of the year if additional resources are needed (see the table below).

Table A-1 Overview of available SGAs

Mandate	SGA	Date	Total cost included in the SGA
ESIF	SGA 2014/1	4/11/2014	Estimated 2014 budget: EUR 39.3 million
ESIF	Amendment No. 1 to SGA 2014/1	29/02/2016	Estimated 2014 budget: EUR 36.3 million
ESIF	SGA 2015/1	29/06/2015	Estimated 2015 budget: EUR 40.3 million
ESIF	Amendment No. 1 to SGA 2015/1	29/02/2016	Estimated 2015 budget: EUR 37.3 million
ESIF	SGA 2016/1	23/08/2016	Estimated 2016 budget: EUR 40.0 million
ESIF	SGA 2017/1	14/6/2017	Estimated 2017 budget: EUR 45.0 million
ESIF	Amendment No. 1 to SGA 2017/1	28/02/2018	Contents of the Amendment not disclosed.
ESIF	SGA 2018/1	10/07/2018	Estimated 2018 budget: EUR 45.0 million
CEF	SGA 2015/2	30/10/2015	Estimated budget July 2015-July 2017: EUR 1.4 million
CEF	Amendment No. 1 to SGA 2015/2	29/06/2017	Estimated budget July 2015-March 2019: EUR 1.4 million
IPA II	SGA IPA II	25/10/2016	Estimated budget January 2016-December 2018: EUR 4 million (1 million earmarked for Turkey)
IPA II	Addendum No. 1 to SGA IPA II	11/02/2017	Estimated budget January 2016-December 2020: EUR 5 million (2 million earmarked for Turkey)
IPA Serbia	JASPERS Contribution Agreement 2014/354-856	12/12/2014	Estimated budget January 2015-December 2016: EUR 1.5 million
IPA Serbia	Addendum No. 1 to JASPERS Contribution Agreement 2014/354-856	24/11/2016	Estimated budget January 2015-December 2019: EUR 1.5 million.

Source: SGAs and relative amendments.

Table 8-1 Comparison budget-actual of SGAs by mandates

Mandate	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ESIF – Budget	36,328,820	37,289,680	40,000,000	45,000,000	45,000,000
ESIF – Actual	26,515,899	32,440,557	35,986,987	36,627,616	41,031,101
Difference (%)	-27%	-13%	-10%	-19%	-9%
IPA II – Budget <sup>1</sup>	-	N/A	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
IPA II – Actual	-	1,990,629	634,410	1,259,741	1,064,670

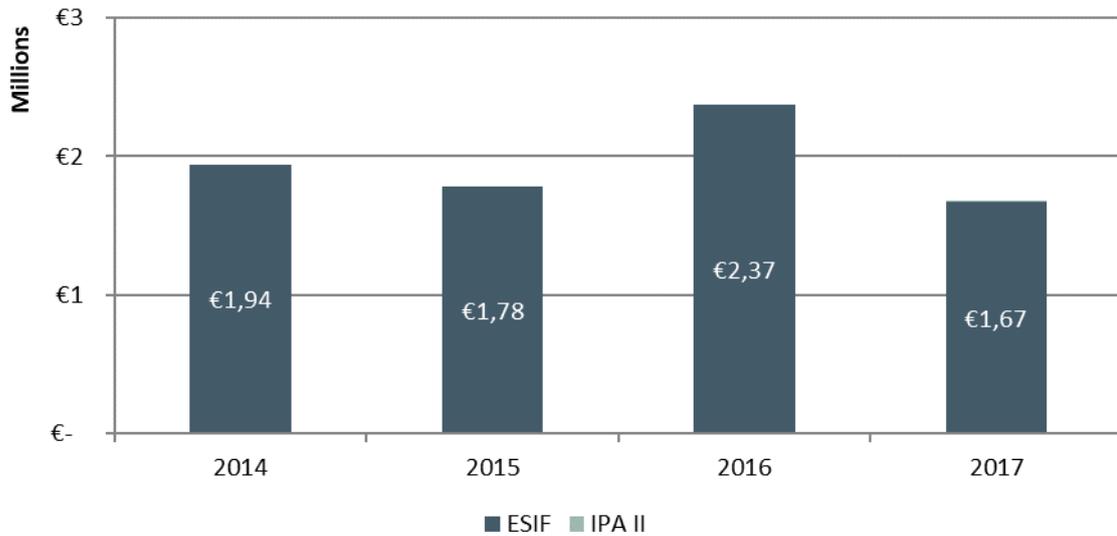
Mandate	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Difference (%)	-	N/A	-37%	26%	6%
Serbia – Budget <sup>2</sup>	-	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
Serbia – Actual	-	51,810	330,773	271,562	474,656
Difference (%)	-	-83%	10%	-9%	58%
CEF – Budget <sup>3</sup>	-	-	-	-	1,402,411
CEF – Actual <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	1,402,411
Difference (%)	-	-	-	-	-

Note: <sup>(1)</sup> Total budget 2016-2020: EUR 5 million. <sup>(2)</sup> Total budget 2015-2019: EUR 1.5 million. <sup>(3)</sup> Total budget, cumulative for the entire period of the CEF 1 mandate, as mentioned in Art. 3 of the Specific Grant Agreement - JASPERS for CEF No 2015/2 (90% EU contribution – 1,262,170 EUR; 10% EIB contribution – 140,241 EUR); the overall budget of the SGA for CEF 1 is not divided by year. <sup>(4)</sup> Total actual expenditure cumulative for the entire period of the CEF 1 mandate, as mentioned in the Final Report of J-CEF Support, section 1.4; the total expenditure presented in the Final Report of J-CEF Support is not differentiated per year, but aggregated for the duration of the mandate. N.B. in addition, under the CEF 2 mandate, the cumulative expenditures actually incurred in 2018, as reported in the Annual report 2018 for the J-CEF 2 Support, amount to 205,722 EUR, total cost (90% EU contribution – 185.150EUR; 10% EIB contribution – 20,572 EUR). The overall budget of the SGA for CEF 2 is not divided by year. For consistency purposes, the amount of expenditure incurred in 2018 under CEF 2 mandate is not included in the above table but mentioned separately since the corresponding information in terms of planned budget, is not available in the SGA for CEF 2. Source: SGAs, JASPERS Annual Reports, JASPERS Audited Accounts, CEF mandate 1+2 reports

Detailed audited accounts were only made available for the ESIF mandate and the IPA mandates. This allowed for a more detailed analysis of expenditure.

External consultancy costs totalled just under 1.7 million EUR in 2017 which represents a 14% decrease from 2014 expenditure, which totalled EUR 2 million EUR. This trend was driven by reduced expenditure on the ESIF Mandate. IPA II costs were less than 1% of all JASPERS external costs in 2017. No general trend for expenditure on external consultants can be perceived as year-to-year fluctuations are erratic. External consultancy costs were 4% of all costs in 2017, and down 3% from 2014. This indicates that the use of external consultants in euro terms has not increased in line with an expansion of the total JASPERS budget.

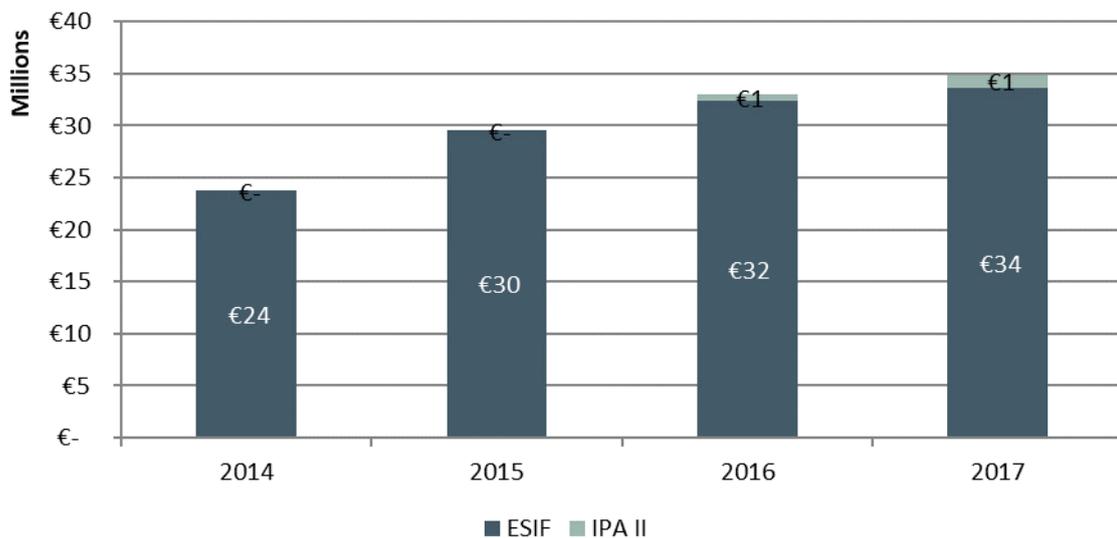
Figure 8-3 Expenditure on External Consultants by Mandate (excl. CEF), 2014-2017



Source: JASPERS audited accounts

Expenditure on staffing totalled EUR 35 million in 2017. This represented a 47% increase in staff expenditure from 2014. This was driven mainly by expenditure increases in the ESIF mandate, mainly due to the hiring of additional staff, but also due to the opening of the IPA 2 mandate in 2016. Staffing costs increased from 89% of all costs in 2014 to 92% of all costs in 2017 indicating that staffing cost rose above average.

Figure 8-4 JASPERS Expenditure on Staff by Mandate (Excl. CEF), 2014-2017



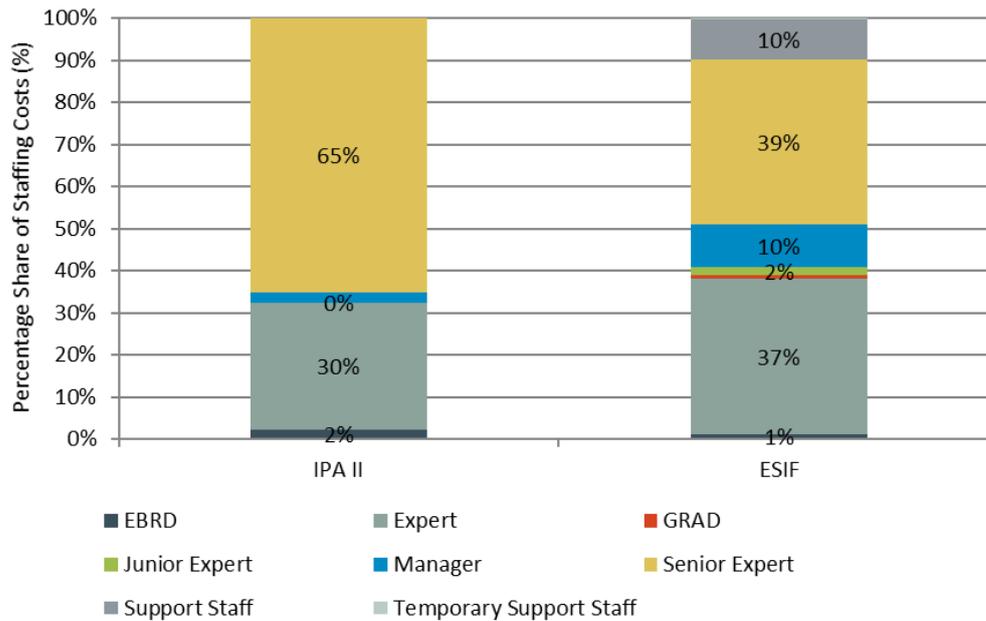
Source: JASPERS audited accounts

Labour expenditure is disaggregated on a grade-by-grade basis. Grades identified from JASPERS Annual Audited Financial Statements include: manager; senior expert; expert; junior expert (ESIF only); support staff (ESIF only); graduate (ESIF only); temporary support staff (ESIF only); and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Staff.

As the sizes of the respective mandates are significantly different, staffing costs have been compared in percentage terms to enable comparisons to be made. The figure below illustrates

that IPA 2 relies heavily on the use of ‘Senior Experts’ in comparison to ESIF projects in EUR terms, whereas ESIF is more reliant upon ‘Expert Staff’ despite having a more diverse staff. Furthermore, staffing costs for the ESIF mandate appear to require more management support, as 10% of costs are allocated to ‘managers’ compared to 2% for the IPA mandate. It is unclear whether these differences are due to the relative size, activities or sectors of assignments between Mandates.

Figure 8-5 JASPERS Expenditure on Staff in Percentage Terms (Excl. CEF), 2014-2017



Source: JASPERS audited accounts

Expenditure on travel and subsistence accounted for just under 3 million EUR in 2017, this accounted for 7% of total expenditure in that year. This is up 94% from 2014 expenditure; just under 1 million EUR. Although expenditure on ‘travel and subsistence’ costs increased by 55% over this period for the ESIF mandate, the majority of cost increases were driven by the opening of the IPA 2 mandate. In comparison to the share of ESIF/IPA 2 costs for other areas, and the number of projects in the respective mandates the IPA 2 mandate appears to be an extremely intensive user of ‘travel and subsistence’ costs, accounting for 47% of travel and subsistence costs in 2017. It is likely that the relatively high level of expenditure on the IPA 2 mandate is due to the types of activities carried out in the IPA states, which require a physical presence. Travel and subsistence costs are subdivided into two subcategories: European Investment Bank; and, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Travel and subsistence costs incurred by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are negligible accounting less than 3% of ESIF travel and subsistence costs in 2017 (EUR 119,000); EBRD travel and subsistence costs were non-existent on the IPA 2 Mandate.

### A.1.6 Alternative schemes

Alternative advisory, capacity building and review schemes are relevant as they have the potential to complement or substitute JASPERS services depending on the scope of their services and delivery mode. This section introduces the key schemes that are providing services similar to those provided by JASPERS.

### Alternative advisory schemes

The European Commission's Impact Assessment on the proposed Regulation establishing InvestEU<sup>196</sup> identifies several schemes that provide similar advisory services and are available to Managing Authorities and beneficiaries of investment projects. The main types of similar advisory services provided through other schemes are presented below. Even though the list of schemes presented further below (see Table 3-2) cannot be considered entirely as alternatives to the delivery of technical advisory support and horizontal and strategy support by JASPERS, they provide services that are to some extent similar or complementary to JASPERS.

Table 8-2 Alternative schemes (for advisory services)

	Scope	Sector focus	TA manager	TA provider(s)
European Investment advisory Hub (EIAH)	Support to identify, prepare and develop investment projects across the EU	Energy, transport, SMEs, telecommunications, R&D, agriculture, environment, other	EIB	EIB/other financial institutions/External consultants
EIB-PASSA	Support project implementation and capacity-building in Romania and Bulgaria	Environment, solid waste, transport, health and horizontal issues	EIB	EIB External consultants
ELENA	Provides grants for TA on the implementation of energy programmes	Renewable energy, energy efficiency and urban mobility	EIB	External consultants
Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF)	Provides TA for infrastructure projects in Western Balkan countries (EU accession)	Energy, environment, Social, transport and digital Infrastructure	Joint initiative of EU, IFIs and others	External consultants
InnovFin advisory	Financial advisory services to improve the bankability and investment readiness of RDI projects	Research, development and innovation	EIB	EIB
EEEF Technical Assistance Facility	Support to project development activities of 16 public beneficiaries in eight MS	Energy efficiency	EEEF Fund manager	External consultants hired by EEEF
Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS)	Support on structural, institutional and administrative reforms	Job creation and sustainable growth	EC	EC
Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)	Technical assistance for preparation of projects	Energy, telecommunications, transport	EIB	EIB / External consultants
H2020 (EE Project Development Assistance)	Support launching of concrete sustainable energy investment projects with building technical,	Energy efficiency	EASME	External consultants

<sup>196</sup> Commission Staff Working Document Impact Assessment accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the InvestEU Programme, SWD (2018) 316 final

	Scope	Sector focus	TA manager	TA provider(s)
Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCF)	<p>economic and legal expertise</p> <p>Technical support to project preparation within natural capital</p>	Natural capital, biodiversity	EIB	External consultants
S3P-Industry-Technical Assistance Facility	Support to identify appropriate financial structuring, governance rules, business models, review of marketing and sales strategies, financials, cash flow analysis, due diligence preparations and intellectual property rights	Agro-food, energy, industrial modernisation	DG GROW	External consultants

Source: European Commission's Impact Assessment on the proposed Regulation establishing InvestEU and desk research

The European Investment Bank supports several other types of schemes providing services similar to JASPERS, as illustrated in the table above. A notable scheme that provides services similar to those of JASPERS is EIB – Project Advisory Support Service Agreements (EIB-PASSA). The EIB-PASSA is a service which provides assistance for project implementation in Romania and Bulgaria. Compared to JASPERS (which in Technical advisory services generally covers project preparation), EIB-PASSA covers a later stage in the project cycle (i.e. the implementation stage). EIB-PASSA's business model is characterised by proximity to clients and by it that the clients pay for the services (through the Technical Assistance budgets). EIB-PASSA works mainly on infrastructure projects in various sectors, such as environment, solid waste and transport, but also on health sector and on horizontal issues (e.g. public procurement) not covered by JASPERS and frequently resorts to external consultants (sourced through the EIB framework), both international and local ones. On individual projects, EIB-PASSA can involve specific expert profiles from the EIB Project Directorate (e.g. engineers).

The European Commission is another important provider of relevant advisory services (beyond JASPERS). For example, through the Structural Reform Support Services (SRSS) emphasis is put on structural, institutional and administrative reforms rather than one-off projects (e.g. individual infrastructure projects). Moreover, SRSS already maintains a systematic dialogue with both EIAH and JASPERS for the identification of projects they could provide assistance for. As such, it cannot be considered as an alternative to JASPERS for Technical advisory Support.

Other international organisations (e.g. the World Bank) can be considered as potential alternatives as regards horizontal and strategy support and technical advisory support, but organisation-specific constraints (e.g. on the geographical scope, the type of activity and/or institutional agreements with national governments) may represent limitations for use, which should be assessed on a case-by-case basis (as regards their costs and benefits as well).

private consultancies could cover jaspers tasks in horizontal/strategic support and technical advisory support (e.g. through framework contracts). in addition, technical assistance services provided to managing authorities and paid for through the specific technical assistance budget within Operational Programmes can be considered as an alternative for specific Technical advisory tasks (e.g. phasing assignments). However, the cost of managing procurement processes and contracts for the EC and national authorities cannot be overlooked.

### **Alternatives available for capacity building and training**

For many capacity building and training assignments, international organisations and specialised consulting companies as well as research centres could effectively offer tailor-made courses and assistance possibly at the same quality level<sup>197</sup>. Although alternative schemes than JASPERS could be identified for 'train the trainers' activities as well, it can be argued that for this particular typology of training JASPERS is better placed than other organisations to deliver it. In fact, in this case JASPERS training could ensure a homogenous and consistent delivery across Member States, thanks to its particular positioning as an EC-EIB joint initiative.

### **Alternatives available for review services**

In the previous programming period, review services were provided by private consultants through framework contract agreements. The consultants were providing 'quick appraisals'<sup>198</sup> which were done through standard checklists and forms. In the previous programming period (2007-2013), the execution of a quick appraisal report could not exceed 15 calendar days, but the scope of the assessment was different in the previous programming period<sup>199</sup>. In contrast, review services provided by JASPERS take up to 30 days to be delivered. In addition, while quick appraisals used to have a unitary price, PSA reports by JASPERS are not assigned a monetary value. In the current programming period, as mentioned above, the European Commission relies solely on JASPERS for the provision of the review services.

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<sup>197</sup> See for example the training offer of the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), training services provided by private consultancies on framework contracts with the EC services, including DG REGIO, or other specialized training courses, such as the Milan Summer School on Cost-Benefit Analysis (<https://www.csilmilano.com/Summer-School/Summer-School.html>).

<sup>198</sup> See for example the Tender specifications to call for tenders 'Multiple framework contract' 2013CE16BAT064, Ref. Ares (2014)1531385 - 14/05/2014.

<sup>199</sup> Source: Guidance on how to use the Framework Contract 'in cascade' CCI 2009CE160AT090, renewed as from 03/12/2012 to request a 'QUICK APPRAISAL'.

## **APPENDIX B PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS**

Separate annex provided.

## APPENDIX C COST SAVINGS

Amongst the technical advisory assignments analysed as part of the evaluation (42 assignments), less than a quarter of the sample (10 out of 42) present elements that may support the argument of cost savings being generated by JASPERS. Furthermore, the nature and occurrence of such achieved savings is however questionable. The following Table provides details on the ten cases.

Table 8-3 Cost savings in Technical advisory assignments

Mandate	Country	Stage of JASPERS involvement <sup>200</sup>	Quantification of savings	Notes on conditions for identifying cost savings
ESIF, MP	Croatia	Feasibility stage	JASPERS quantified cost savings of EUR 6.6 million (8% of project cost). However, due to varying assumptions during project preparation, a precise quantification is hardly possible. JASPERS also generated a cost increase by suggesting a PIU (EUR 10 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action completion note present</li> <li>Feedback form: 'moderate added value' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>Value added fiche: No cost savings mentioned</li> <li>Cost savings resulting from refinements to the demand assessment (the action completion note does not reflect this change)</li> </ul>
ESIF, MP	Romania	Pre-feasibility stage	Cost reduction of EUR 24 million in the total investment costs (16%), of which 17 million of reduced EU co-financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action completion note present</li> <li>Feedback form: 'very significant added value' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>Value added fiche: No cost savings mentioned</li> <li>JASPERS technical advisory supported the beneficiary in scoping the project in line with the requirements of the Commission which led to the removal of several investment components from the scope of the project</li> </ul>

<sup>200</sup> Source: JADE.

Mandate	Country	Stage of JASPERS involvement <sup>200</sup>	Quantification of savings	Notes on conditions for identifying cost savings
ESIF, MP	Greece	Application stage	Reduction of EUR 213 million in the submitted investments costs (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action completion note present</li> <li>Feedback form: 'significant added value' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>Value added fiche: No cost savings mentioned</li> <li>Cost reduction was achieved in the submitted investment costs in two ways. First, by considering actual economic bids/contracted prices (lower compared to the previously budgeted prices). However, this is not a reduction that can be directly attributed to JASPERS. Second, by performing a more accurate calculation of the eligible expenditure for co-financing that considers the revenues generated during implementation (in addition to operation). However, this means that the EU grant was reduced because revenues were calculated more precisely, not the investment cost. As such, this reduction can hardly be defined as a JASPERS-generated cost saving at project level.</li> </ul>
ESIF, MP	Romania	Feasibility stage	Budget for the training activities was revised in line with JASPERS advice. No evidence available for precise quantification of cost reduction, estimated at around EUR 3 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action completion note present</li> <li>Feedback form: 'very significant added value' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>Value added fiche: No cost savings mentioned</li> <li>Reduction related to budget for training activities</li> </ul>
CEF	Croatia	Feasibility stage	Cost reduction from 6.7 million EUR/km to 6.39 million EUR/km (i.e. a 310,000 EUR/km saving)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project development report present</li> <li>Feedback form not available</li> <li>Value added fiche not available</li> <li>It is not clear from available project documentation on what basis these savings were realised. As such, it is difficult to attribute them to JASPERS' intervention</li> </ul>

Mandate	Country	Stage of JASPERS involvement <sup>200</sup>	Quantification of savings	Notes on conditions for identifying cost savings
CEF	Romania	Feasibility stage	Cost reduction of EUR 200 million for better option selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project development report present</li> <li>• Feedback form: 'moderate added value' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>• Value added fiche not available</li> <li>• Reduction related to option selection, but the attribution of the reduction to JASPERS is unclear</li> </ul>
	Hungary	Application stage	Cost reduction of EUR 1 million (0.3%) in total investment cost and EUR 2 million (1.4% to initial cost in first application) in total EU co-financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action completion note present</li> <li>• Feedback form: 'not applicable' as regards cost savings as a result of JASPERS advice</li> <li>• Value added fiche: 'Cost savings potential identified by JASPERS: 20 m EUR</li> <li>• The reduction of the overall investment costs of the projects and of the EU co-financing was a result of the changes that were made (with advisory support) to the scope of the project</li> </ul>
ESIF, Non-MP	Slovenia	Feasibility stage	JASPERS raised a number of outstanding issues and expressed concerns regarding the validity of assumptions. According to JASPERS, the resulting cost savings in case of non-implementation of the project would be about EUR 30 million (of EU co-funding, on a total investment cost of EUR 41 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action completion note present</li> <li>• Feedback form not available</li> <li>• Value added fiche not available</li> <li>• The action completion note states that JASPERS formulated its opinion on the basis of the available documentation and that not the full set of required material had been received. As such, to some extent JASPERS' contribution could not be complete. It is thus difficult to assess JASPERS contribution ex post. Further, the project application was ultimately submitted for funding with national resources. As a result, no ultimate assessment can be made on the generation of cost savings in this assignment.</li> </ul>

Mandate	Country	Stage of JASPERS involvement <sup>200</sup>	Quantification of savings	Notes on conditions for identifying cost savings
ESIF, Non-MP	Bulgaria	Feasibility stage	<p>JASPERS’ action completion note did not recommend the funding of the project in its current state. Since the advisory services were provided at a late stage of project preparation, it was difficult for the beneficiary to make the necessary changes to documents already prepared by other consultants. Eventually, the project was not approved for financing. As such, JASPERS may be said to have generated cost savings in the order of EUR 12 million (total cost of the project, of which 8.1 million of EU co-funding). JASPERS quantified at EUR 10 million the cost savings made possible in this and the next assignment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action completion note present</li> <li>• Feedback form does not mention JASPERS’ contribution in terms of cost savings</li> <li>• Value added fiche not available</li> <li>• Cost savings did not come about through a better design or enhanced project features, but through the rejection (by the Commission) of the application for funding. Moreover, it is unclear if the project has subsequently been revised by national authorities (and if the amount of cost savings is therefore different)</li> </ul>

Mandate	Country	Stage of JASPERS involvement <sup>200</sup>	Quantification of savings	Notes on conditions for identifying cost savings
ESIF, Non-MP	Bulgaria	Feasibility stage	<p>JASPERS highlighted that the rationale of selected components of the project was not soundly established. The project was subsequently revised and ultimately approved for co-funding. While no information is available for a precise quantification of cost savings, this appears to be the only case of savings actually generated by JASPERS at project level. JASPERS quantified at EUR 10 million the cost savings made possible in this and the previous assignment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action completion note present</li> <li>• Feedback form does not mention JASPERS' contribution in terms of cost savings</li> <li>• Value added fiche not available</li> </ul>

Source: Assignment documentation

## **APPENDIX D ONLINE TARGETED CONSULTATION**

Separate annex provided.

## **APPENDIX E SEMINAR**

Separate annex provided.



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